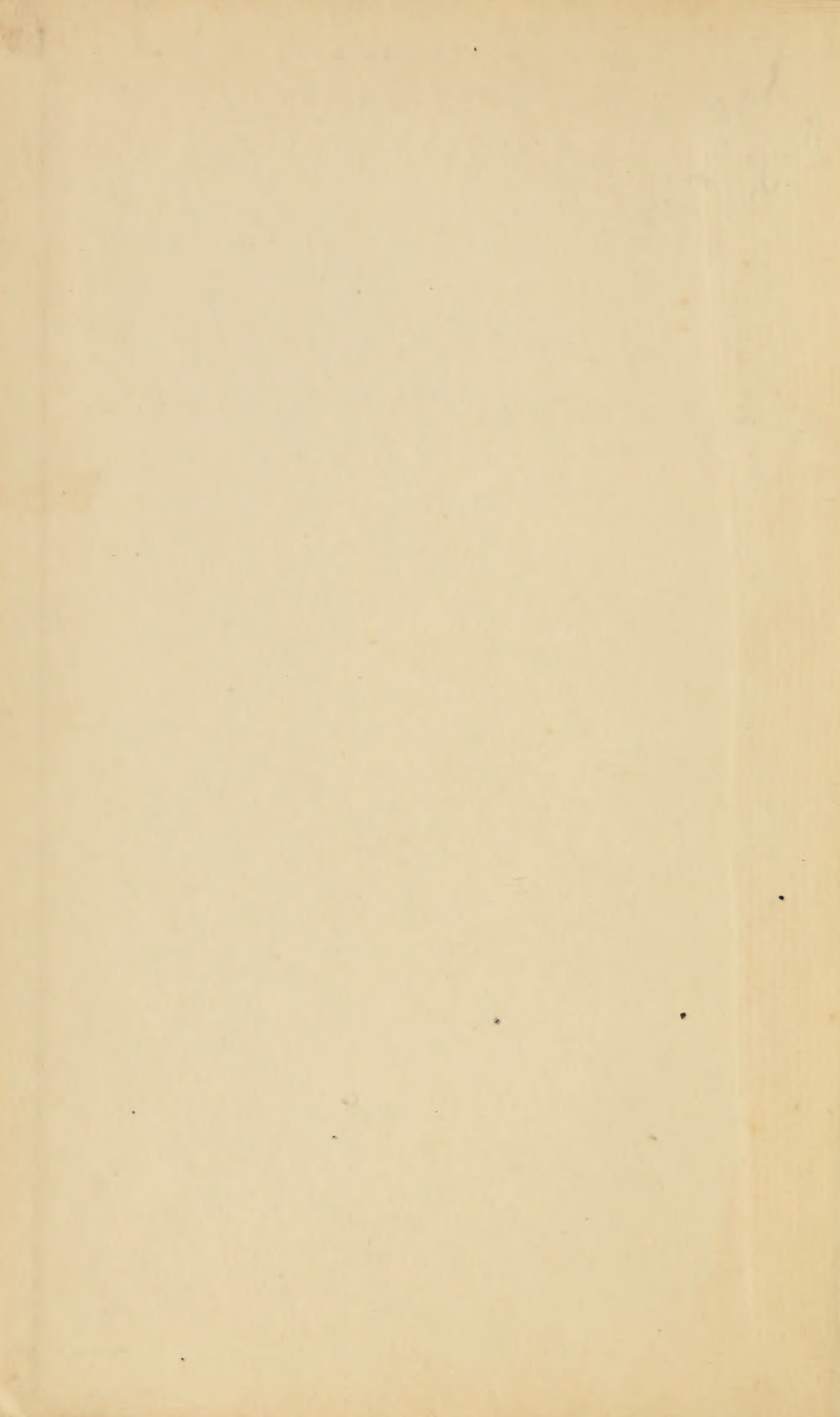


PLAYWRITING FOR PROFIT

ARTHUR EDWIN KROWS





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PLAYWRITING FOR PROFIT

Neither is nature without art sufficient to any one for any practical achievement, nor is art which has not nature with it. When both come together there are still needed appliances and means to bring the piece out; love of the task, practice, a lucky occasion, time, and a critic able to grasp what is said. If any of these chances to be missing, a man will not come to the goal set before him. Natural gifts, good will, painstaking method—these are what make wise and good poets.—*One of the oldest pieces of pure literary criticism extant; attributed to the dramatist SIMYLUS, who flourished about 355 B.C.*

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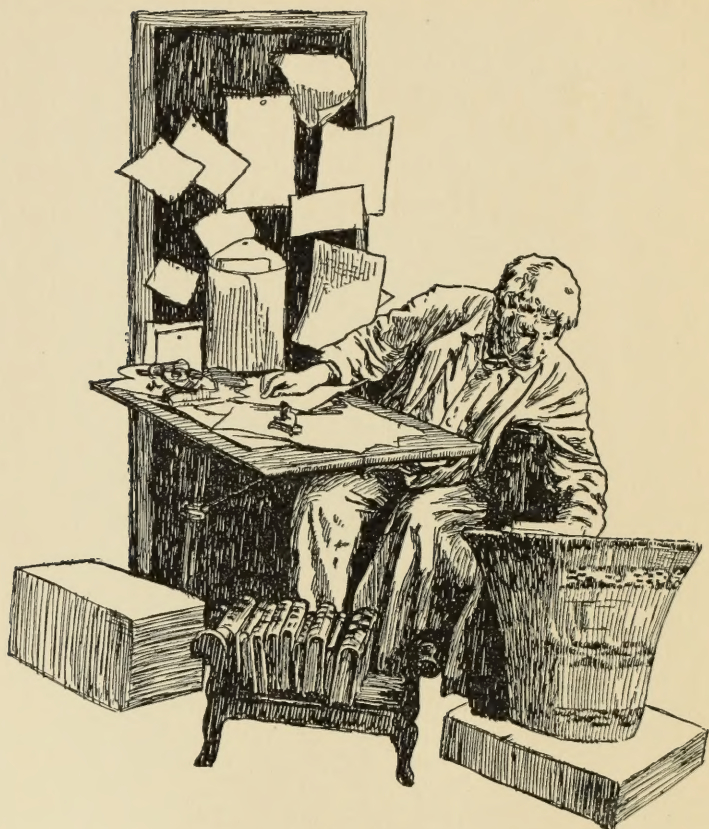
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DAVID BELASCO WRITING A PLAY

Or rather, constructing a play, for "the Governor" prefers not to write but to dictate. His copious notes are kept within easy reach of his chair, some in roomy baskets and others pinned up on nearby screens. He works with as little regard to hours as Thomas A. Edison and is just as indefatigable in obtaining results. His sense of responsibility to his audiences leads him to the most exhaustive tests of every detail in a manuscript, whether it is his own or that of an outside play intended for his production. "I believe in stage-managing a 'script,'" he says, "as much as possible before rehearsals."

PLAYWRITING FOR PROFIT

BY

ARTHUR EDWIN KROWS

AUTHOR OF "PLAY PRODUCTION IN AMERICA"
"EQUIPMENT FOR STAGE PRODUCTION," ETC.

*Illustrated with 20 workshop pages
provided especially for this book
by well-known dramatists
and producers*

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
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1928

KROWS
PLAYWRITING FOR PROFIT

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To
THE LIVING MEMORY OF
WILLIAM THOMPSON PRICE

PREFACE

PROBABLY no written work can use a preface more legitimately than a book on playwriting, for that kind of effort is surrounded by considerations not strictly germane to its subject but that nevertheless play a large part in its success. Their nature being such that they cannot well be noticed in the body of the text, they must be discussed separately; and a preface is an established way to do it.

The most serious condition of this kind is a wide prejudice of writing men themselves against books on technique. This would be defensible if they had read at least the standard works and then had barred out the others with them in an honest general dislike; but this is rarely true. Your average successful dramatist has read none of them, and even refuses to read them—although this is saying in effect that no one can teach him anything—which of course is an impossible situation for anyone who tries to learn, who hopes to be open-minded and who is willing, if not eager, to listen to other opinions beside his own.

However, one simply has not the time to read *everything* written about any single profession. He would be foolish to undertake so much even if he could, for there comes a time in all technical reading when what follows is mere confirmation; and confirmation is better found in personal practice. The busy worker must discriminate. Raising which point, naturally brings up also the question why, then, a dramatist should read this book.

There are several reasons. First, this work, although never before published and only lately submitted for publication, already has gained a background of authority. Especial circumstances caused its circulation in manuscript throughout the past six or seven years. Twenty-six chapters out of forty-

four, in seventy-five typewritten copies, have passed in that time from hand to hand among the author's friends and among their friends. Represented in that reading circle are many well-known men and women of acknowledged capacity to judge; and the author is justifiably proud of their esteem. The work has had the further compliment of being pirated in part once or twice, while three outside interests have wanted to turn it into a correspondence course for sale at high price to all persons with the playwriting urge.

These facts naturally warrant a dip into the book proper. The reader having undertaken that, the text will make its own appeal to common sense; and the preface therefore may be abandoned at this point.

ARTHUR EDWIN KROWS

NEW YORK, *August*, 1928



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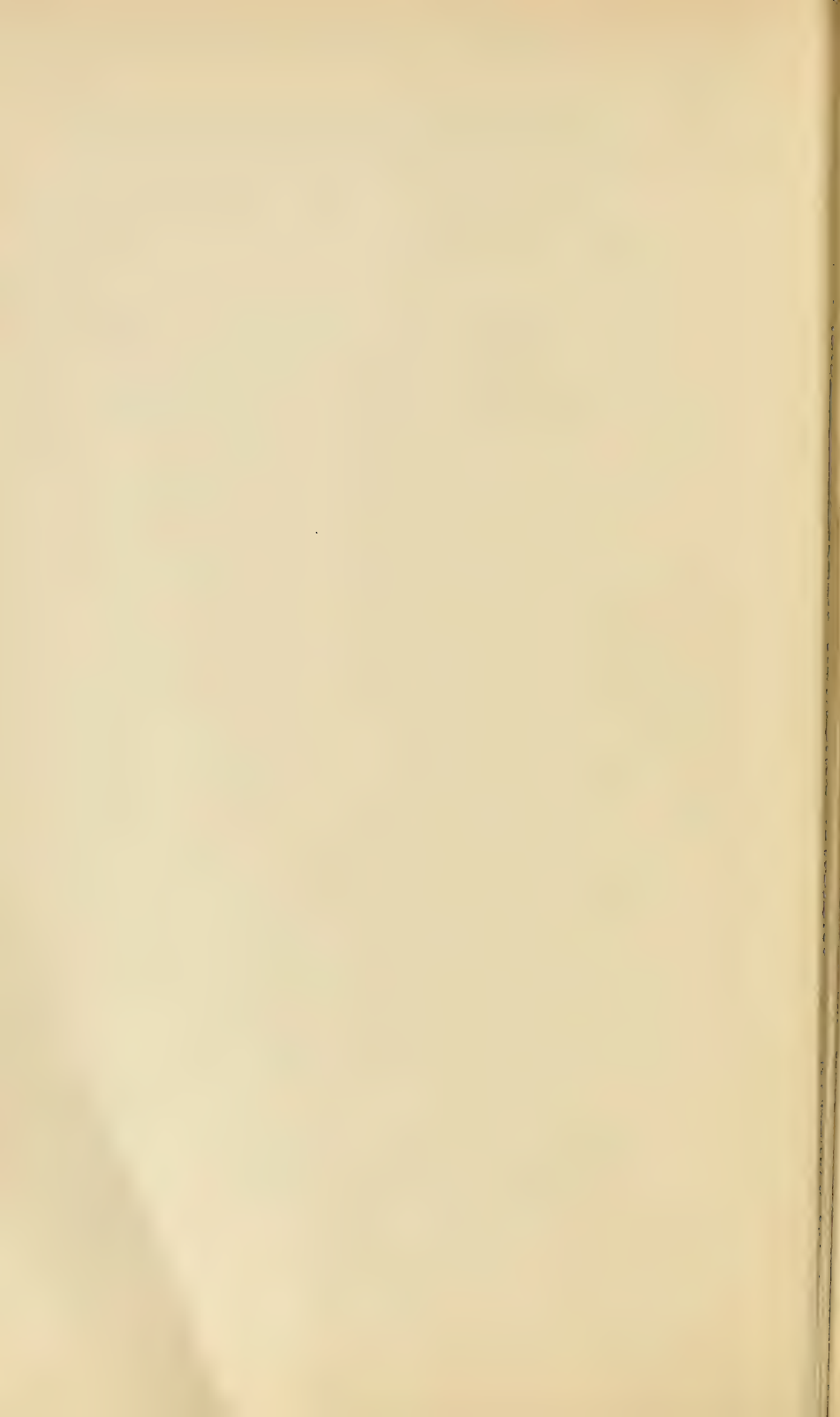
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PLAYWRITING FOR PROFIT

Neither is nature without art sufficient to any one for any practical achievement, nor is art which has not nature with it. When both come together there are still needed appliances and means to bring the piece out; love of the task, practice, a lucky occasion, time, and a critic able to grasp what is said. If any of these chances to be missing, a man will not come to the goal set before him. Natural gifts, good will, painstaking method—these are what make wise and good poets.—*One of the oldest pieces of pure literary criticism extant; attributed to the dramatist SIMYLUS, who flourished about 355 B.C.*





PLAYWRITING FOR PROFIT

PART ONE

WAYS AND MEANS

CHAPTER I

THE KNOW-HOW

JUST that there may be no mistaking the purpose of this work let it be said at once that it is not a book of magic. Merely reading the pages will not make a person healthy, wealthy, and wise, and honored in the theater. It will show, however, that the profession of playwriting calls for the best in every person who undertakes it and that the gains of those who reach the top at last are richly deserved. Moreover, as the proof of knowledge is in the doing thereof, the actual observance of what these pages recommend will result in workmanlike, actable, creditable plays. Beyond these things all depends on the dramatist's personal philosophy of life.

The rewards of playwriting would be small if every one could do it; but the fact is that only exceptional persons can be Shakespeares and Molières, and therefore a high premium is placed upon their efforts. It is so very high that it becomes a goal for thousands. Nevertheless, and no matter how broad and smooth the highway may be made, only a few will ever reach the heights. That few may include you and me, for our footsteps have been turned thither—and at the same time it may not, because the uncertainties of life easily disprove the old belief that every man is the architect of his own fortune.

These pages are intended for the information of persons who actually are writing plays. The familiar critical plan of showing how ready-made plays may be dissected and put together again is rarely helpful because the rough materials for a brand-new drama by a groping dramatist necessarily are very different from the trimmed and polished parts of an expert's finished work. The person in the workshop needs a demonstration beginning with the material as it exists in life before any refining process has been applied, and meeting craftsmanship difficulties in the precise order of his own literary trials. Therefore the present work aims to consider honestly and reasonably the technical problems that beset all writers of stage plays, in a natural succession from bare idea to complete subject.

Part of the honesty of approach is indicated in the main title, "Playwriting for Profit." The phrase, "making money," has a ring of unscrupulousness about it; but there is no valid reason why the element of remuneration should not become an added incentive to the artist. This has authority, too. Lessing, for one, maintained, in his "Literary Letters," that after thirty a man must fill his purse as well as his head. The bread-and-butter question is quite as pressing to those in the writing profession as to those in any other; and although it is true that to produce great art of any kind one must suffer much, it does not seem necessary to suffer *too* much. Dickens said that all through the successful period of his life he was haunted by the miseries of his early apprenticeship to the blacking business. Similarly, many another successful man has found achievement tinged with bitterness by the needless agonies endured to reach it. The title of this book refers to that happy course between pursuit of money for its own sake and an absolute renunciation, to which an aspiring artist may look without compromising his self-respect.

Recognizing, then, that even the beginner must live and that the help given him must serve every instant of his working day, the chapters herewith are to be used as a chest of tools and not to be bound in morocco as a theorizing literary performance.

DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE

WITH all the foregoing granted, there remains a serious obstacle to helpfulness of this work, and that is the persistent belief of a large majority of persons that any code of dramatic construction tends to formalize, stereotype, dehumanize, and otherwise limit the imagination and its product. It is but human to doubt; and because the shadow of that doubt might easily obscure each step in the course of reasoning to come, I invite you to consider it now, at this very start of our acquaintance, in the earnest belief that it may be fully dispelled.

In the world of the so-called regular theater this notion is an old, old story. Through my close association there with the late William Thompson Price, who gave much of his life to fighting the fallacy, I am fairly familiar with the arguments pro and con. Examples from the history of the theater have been supplemented by others from my personal experience. Cyril Harcourt, author of "A Pair of Silk Stockings," "A Place in the Sun," and other comedies remarkable for their spontaneity, more than once denounced for my benefit the belief that playwriting might be taught—although he reminded me that he always found it arduous labor. Henry V. Esmond, author of "When We Were Twenty-One" and "Eliza Comes to Stay," told me the same thing in substance. George Foster Platt, stage director at the quondam New Theater of New York, acknowledging a copy of an old manuscript on dramatic technique prepared by a celebrated actor-playwright, told me that Aristotle's "Poetics" had shaken his spontaneity long ago, and after reading that other contribution his imagination would be held in leash forever.

On the other hand there is William Archer's remark to me during an interview that: "Playwriting may not be taught in the sense of endowing a man with reason, but people may be made to think. They can learn processes; and certainly beginners may be shown what *not* to do." There is the suggestion of Cyril Maude, enthusiastically expressed to me one afternoon at old Wallack's Theater when he was making-up

as "Grumpy," that the fact that schools of playwriting are maintained and encouraged in the United States may explain why American dramatists are known throughout the world. There are repeated common-sense declarations in interviews and private conversations of that valiant champion of truth in the theater, Brander Matthews, who believes with all his heart in playmaking method. But above all, in my experience, are the utterances of William Thompson Price, who taught playwriting for the hundred years to come.

George Pierce Baker, now of Yale and lately of Harvard, whose instruction has enabled a number of American dramatists of acknowledged importance to rise, takes cognizance of the common saying that "the dramatist is born, not made," by remarking in the preface to his splendid book, "Dramatic Technique," that it "grants the dramatist at least one experience of other artists, namely birth, but seeks to deny him the instruction in art granted the architect, the painter, the sculptor, and musician." William Thompson Pierce's simplest way of meeting the common saying was to retort with another proverb, "What can be learned can be taught."¹

The perverse popular belief that artists suffer from discipline has done incalculable harm to all the arts. In one form or another it has prevailed for centuries, galvanized into fresh life by statements of distinguished persons, condemning formal lessons as fatal to soul-expression. It has led to the foolish notion that anybody can step into professions of art without preparation, has made it virtually impossible for even an established artist to speak with real authority and has lowered art in general by withholding recognition of honest standards.

In a discussion of this kind it must constantly be borne in mind that art, in strict sense, is the means of expression and not what is expressed. Ruskin makes this very clear, in his "Elements of Drawing," when he says, "Though no one

¹ Horace remarks that, while men who never wielded arms would forbear from an exhibition for fear of ridicule, as he that never pitched a quoit or tossed a ball or whirled a troque forbears, he who never learned to sing presumes to sing verse.—"The Art of Poetry: The Poetical Treatises of Horace, Vida, and Boileau," edited with introduction and notes by Albert S. Cook, Boston, 1892.

can invent by rule, there are some simple laws of arrangement which it is well for you to know, because, though they will not enable you to produce a good picture, they will often assist you to set forth what goodness may be in your work in a more telling way than you could have done otherwise; and by tracing them in the works of good composers, you may better understand the grasp of their imagination, and the power it possesses over their materials." It is possible to provide a student with even the philosophy and discriminating intelligence necessary to playwriting; but that is the function of general education and belongs not to playmaking method. These virtues should be possessed by the student in advance.

In 1915, when George Jean Nathan expressed his view that George Pierce Baker had taught his students "the facile trick of building shows," but nothing about writing plays containing philosophy, cultured wit, smart observations, and penetration, Heywood Broun, who had studied under Baker, promptly responded in *The New York Tribune* (October 31): "Mr. Nathan seemingly is of the impression that Professor Baker conducts a school for playwrights. Such is not the case. George Pierce Baker is a professor, and a busy one. . . . His schedule usually is made up of at least three courses. One of these is a course which is designed to teach something concerning the technique of writing plays. No attempt has been made to teach philosophy, cultured wit, or observation. Possibly this habit of sticking to the subject is a common professorial failing. We recollect that we obtained not the slightest insight into the rise and fall of the Dutch Republic while studying botany."

The answer to the present problem is education, education of all concerned in the work of production, that expert service may be appreciated for its soundness artistically and financially. The advantages of education as applied to anything need not be defended. We owe everything in civilization to the honest, earnest effort to learn more and still more about ourselves and our environment. The advantages of democracy, the comforts of invention, even the great force of Education itself, we owe to Light. We must have light on

the subject of playmaking. As Robert W. Chambers told me one morning back in 1913: "There is too much making mystery of ordinary professions like writing. There always is a reason for a thing—success, for instance—and a superstition is not a satisfactory makeshift."

I shall never forget my stimulating interview with this writer. It was around Christmastime in the year mentioned. The place was the darkened auditorium of the Frazee Theater in New York where the late Ben Teal was directing rehearsals of the novelist's musical play "Iole." Chambers gave me that attention not necessarily devoted to the stage while he amplified his working creed.

"The vague definition of art as something beyond the possible comprehension of men in common is absolutely foolish," he said.² "We know what the standards are; we know what the old masters have done, and that we are not nearly living up to them. Let each man make his own estimate of greatness and never bow to the authority of mere names. He will learn to appreciate the best by challenging the things that the masters have to teach, and accepting them only when they meet his exactions. How can any man be idle with so much to be learned? The dispelling of mysteries is not the degradation of art but recognition of the dignity of labor.

"People must work," he continued. "There is no compromise. Labor comprehends all. A man should feel that there is nothing to stop him in his upward climb but the blue sky. That's the way to move mountains. He must not be afraid to tackle anything. One never knows what he can do till he has tried. All men and women may become chosen instruments by making themselves available.

"You never find that stuff about inspiration mentioned by the great writers who are popularly supposed to have been animated

² "Inspiration" is not unknown outside of playwriting, nor is it new. No less an authority than St. Paul took pains to discuss it under the heading of "gift of tongues" (see especially his "First Epistle to the Corinthians," Chap. XIV), and to state his preference for men who had also the ability to interpret their involuntary utterances. Plato (in the "Timæus"), remarked that no man was inspired save when he was asleep or demented, and that the inspiration was of no value till he regained his wits. On the whole, students of "inspiration" and "enthusiasm" are inclined to refer the extravagances of both not to super-intelligence but to the "possessions," "trances," and tribal dance-madness of primitive peoples. A little common sense like that of St. Paul or Plato, is of great value in clarifying the whole matter.

by it. They wrote for their bread and butter; and when their writings proved acceptable they were ordered in most unsentimental manner to provide more. So with the painters and sculptors. Michelangelo received orders from the Pope to do his wonderful paintings in the Vatican. The old masters had to earn their livings. There was no cloud-walking about that. It is so refreshing to read their lives. All that they said and did is so frank and sane. Take those old Dutch, Flemish and English painters. They never were heard to utter that shriek about, 'What is art?' They just went to work and applied it.³

"The genius to recognize is the genius of hard work. There is no need of waiting for inspiration to come, of waiting for propitious moods and hours. Inspiration will be found at the desk. One must get on the job and reason it out. There is altogether too much of this sitting-around-and-talking, too little of that getting-up-and-doing. No one has time to waste. Lifetime is brief. Today is too short by twenty-four hours for all the things a man has to do."

Perhaps this does not thrill you as it does me. Perhaps it seems to you like an anthology of bromides. Possibly the explanation of my feeling is that Chambers said merely something I like to believe. In any event, I'm going to let this stand as a preface to my own explanation of the existence and the helpfulness of method in writing plays, contenting myself with the observation that all that is true is trite. Carlyle Ellis reminded me not long ago that the most vital things in life—birth, marriage, and death—are the greatest bromides in the world.

I present for your examination four simple, related facts: first, there is an art of playwriting; second, it is necessary to uniform dramatic effectiveness; third, it is universal in its application; and fourth, it is directly helpful to spontaneous expression.

³ "Even Shakespeare and Molière," says Goethe in his "Conversations with Eckermann," Friday, April 29, 1825, "had no other view. Both of them wished, above all things, to make money by their theaters. In order to attain this, their principal aim, they necessarily strove that everything should be as good as possible, and that, besides good old plays, there should be some clever novelty to please and attract. The prohibition of 'Tartuffe' was a thunderbolt to Molière, but not so much for the poet as for the director Molière, who had to consider the welfare of an important troupe, and to find some means to procure bread for himself and his actors."

THE PLAYGOING SCHOOL

THE defenders of unassisted genius recognize the value of what is called the School of Hard Knocks. "Experience is a hard school," said Benjamin Franklin, "but fools will learn in no other." Part of the curriculum in that institution is to attend the theater as regularly as possible. This is neither new nor objectionable. From time immemorial the tyro has been advised to go to the playhouse to see how plays are written. Shakespeare himself "frequented the plays all his younger time," as we learn from the diary of the Reverend John Ward, vicar of Stratford. Even Aristotle, who wrote the first important treatise on the art some twenty-two centuries ago, indirectly suggested theatergoing by saying that his findings were based on the practice of the best dramatists of his day. It is excellent counsel that should be followed by every would-be playwright, because in witnessing a drama he sees all there is to the manuscript from which it has been made, together with acting, scenery, and other elements that the author could only imagine. Surely this is an illuminating experience.

Yet, no matter how steadily the student patronizes the playhouse, he cannot complete his professional education without guidance. Otherwise one might say that the most inveterate theatergoer is the best qualified to write, which does not follow at all. Of course, the confirmed playgoers, such as the late "Diamond Jim" Brady, who rarely missed an important first night, are not necessarily even disposed to try their hands at playwriting; but newspaper and magazine critics frequently have essayed it and often to their sorrow.⁴

One reason why literarily inclined theatergoers often fail in their playwriting attempts is that they are misled by the apparent simplicity of successful dramas. The more effective these are the more artless they seem. They actually invite imitation because of their spontaneous look. The plot that unfolds so readily and the characters that are so humanly

⁴It is necessary to remark, however, that the newspaper profession has provided a large number of successful dramatists in all countries. These persons have come from reportorial ranks rather than from the dramatic desk.

commonplace could not have required much constructive genius. At least, it seems that way. So you will hear—as I have heard—the ingenious, apologetic explanation of the inexperienced man who would write, his competency being that he has witnessed all the great plays acted by the best artists since and including the days of Booth, Kean, Forrest, and Macready. The best plays are obvious imitations of life, he will tell you in effect; and life being a matter of common experience, its translation to the stage or screen must be a simple process. His is a specious argument, but it is based on only a partial truth. The whole truth is that a drama is more than an imitation of life. It is an interpretation.

THE COMMON SENSE OF ART

THE artist's discriminating eyes have seen a symbol, a peculiar beauty, a truth; and by his art—which is to say, his manner of interpretation—he has revealed it to others. Unnecessary details have been suppressed; high lights have been picked out; shadows have been intensified; elements have been rearranged, and perhaps forms have been distorted in the interest of illusion. It is not nature but an appearance of nature.⁵ The purpose of the interpretation, if it is animated by earnestness, is to awaken in the spectator a better conception of what previously seemed uninspiring. Failing this, art is unworthy of the name.

Life has not the simplicity of the drawings by Jules Guerin; yet he has conveyed with striking truthfulness certain phases of its dignity and repose. Life does not contain in one small view the daring gorgeousness of Frank Brangwyn's color; but from his splendid canvases the eye drinks in the sparkle and dash of life in motion. Life does not contain

⁵ "That unity, harmony, 'convergence of characters,' as M. Taine calls it, which gives to works of art their superiority over works of nature, is wholly due to *elimination*. Any natural object will do, if the artist has wit enough to pounce upon some one feature of it as characteristic, and suppress all merely accidental items which do not harmonize with this."—William James, "Psychology," p. 173. New York, 1892. In an essay on dramatic technique quoted by Barrett H. Clark in his "Study of the Modern Drama" (New York, new edition, 1928), the French dramatist, Henri Lavedan, illustrates this fact by actually shaping a rough play idea.

all the lustrous shadows of Joseph Pennell's etchings; yet partly by their means we thrill to the vigorous structural beauty he portrays. Similarly, the form of life does not betray the inner spirit as in George Grey Barnard's sculptured figures; but his marble portraits could not be changed without a loss of what we prize in him.

There are marked differences between life and all works of art purporting to represent it. Compare this painted landscape with that photograph of the actual scene. The ugly little shack that offended the eye viewing the meadow, now is blended with the old-fashioned garden that spreads neglected before it; the stagnant pool in the foreground has become a velvet-edged mirror of the sky; the jumble of rocks on the distant mountainside is transformed to a citadel. There is something added and much omitted—yet, somehow, despite its unsuspected loveliness, it is a clearly recognizable picture of a certain place.

Certainly art is not precisely the same as life. The oft-quoted line from "Hamlet" about "holding the mirror up to nature" has been perverted to mean a literal reproduction; but if the rash playwright who seeks justification for this in Shakespeare will examine the line with its context, he will see that Hamlet, instructing the players in Act III, meant something far closer to the purpose of art:

HAMLET. Be not too tame neither; but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first, and now, was, and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time, his form, and pressure. Now this, overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure of which one, must, in your allowance, o'erweigh a whole theatre of others.

I may remark in passing that Shakespeare is far too loosely quoted anyway by those who rarely turn his pages. The constant users of the statement that "The play's the thing,"

almost without exception are unaware that Shakespeare was not praising drama above others forms of art, but that Hamlet was deciding upon private theatricals as an excellent device wherewith "to catch the conscience of the king."

If the interpretation is of life, it should, of course, resemble life. But as I have tried to make very clear, there is a vast difference between resemblance and reproduction. The points by which we recognize the truths of life may not be superficial at all, in which case the exterior would not greatly matter, and the artist would strip it away that he might present a truer picture. But the appearance of the interpretation, however lacking in unessentials it may be, should *seem* as spontaneous and true as any part of nature.⁶

HIDING THE WHEELS

Now for a delicate problem. It has been established that the artist must select and reject and accent in accordance with his plan. He must predetermine. If he betrays this plan in the interpretation, together with the arduous labor required for its execution, his audience will realize at once that the interpretation is not spontaneous, that it is not a literal reproduction of life.⁷ So the audience will be apt to impute insincerity to the artist and in a sort of disgust withhold the desired response. Dramatists have told me time and time again—Owen Davis, for instance, even in the old days when he used to write blood-and-thunder melodrama—that without an audience's confidence in the genuineness and sincerity of what they see, a play must be ineffective. Davis could not even make his villain utter a convincing "Cur-r-ses!" without believing it whole-heartedly himself as he wrote it. The way

⁶ "Yet nature is made better by no mean,
But nature makes that mean; so, o'er that art,
Which, you say, adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes."

—Shakespeare, "A Winter's Tale," IV, 3.

⁷ Allowance must be made here for such plays as Pirandello's "Six Characters in Search of an Author," Molnar's "The Play's the Thing," and Hazelton and Benrimo's "The Yellow Jacket," where the way things are done is deliberately made the focus of attention. They do not invalidate the main point, but merely represent dramatists playing with technique. The methods to which they call attention, happen to be especially interesting in themselves.

out of the difficulty is carefully to conceal the plan, which shows the good sense of the axiom that, "art consists in hiding art."⁸

This old saying is true in the broadest sense. The tyro at painting is soon told by his teacher not to plant his subject at dead center on his canvas, not to draw his horizon precisely midway between top and bottom, not to balance one rock with another—but rather to avoid the stiffness of obvious composition by using with intelligence the infinitely varied terms of life. In verse the analectic line disarms suspicion of singsong cadence. In music changes of tempo and key cover with sweeps of emotion the composer's hours of labor. The untrained person's idea of artistic arrangement is literal symmetry, which is anything but living, whereas the true artist gains balance and composition with apparently unrelated elements, achieving his end without obviousness.

So it is that the less a spectator realizes the art of a play, the defter must be the play's construction. It must be a labor of pains. It isn't simple at all; it only *seems* so. Richard Brinsley Sheridan had it about right back in the eighteenth century when he penned that celebrated couplet in "Cleo's Protest; or the Picture Varnished,"

You write with ease to show your breeding;
But easy writing's vile hard reading.

The utmost efforts are required for worth-while results. For what we receive in honor and money recompense, we must give in equal or greater measure.

It seems, then, that there really is such a thing as art, and that it plays an important part in human progress. The artist interprets life. Each interpretation requires a mode of presentation—or an art—to eliminate the unrelated things that obscure the same vision in nature; and because the spontaneity of nature must be preserved in the vision, the preconception of the latter must be kept a secret of the studio.

That there must be an art—meaning some particular

⁸ Which seems to explain why Wagner refers to the plays of Shakespeare as, "definitely planned histrionic improvisations."—See Burlingame, "Art, Life, and Theories of Richard Wagner."

The Shotgun Wedding

By mistake boy is forced
 to marry girl - He loves
 her - She hates him and
 is madly in love with
 another boy - Now they
 are married he must
 win her love but as
 he knows nothing
 about women he
 must make a study
 of them - he does -
 the resulting trouble -
 in the end - brings
 him to victory over
 the girl - Rough farce
 with straight line
 dramatic plot under
 the fun - - should be -
 in many scenes with
 no parts between story
 than *Nerves & Shocks*
 but same type of
 rough humor -

Courtesy of the Author

"THE SHOTGUN WEDDING" BY OWEN DAVIS

The original idea of the farce produced in the summer of 1928 by William Harris, Jr., torn from the author's notebook. One of the most prolific dramatists in America, Owen Davis has written well over two hundred produced plays. Leaving Harvard in 1893 he began as a writer of blood-and-thunder melodrama, taking his place in the better theaters with "The Family Cupboard" in 1913, and ten years later winning the Pulitzer prize with "Icebound." His outstanding fault is that he can't stop writing plays. He has tried repeatedly to take a vacation, but always returns with a new 'script.

method of handling material for an especial interpretation—is an obvious conclusion. Indeed, the moment an artist undertakes an especial interpretation he commits himself to a particular method. A. A. Milne, author of "The Dover Road," affects to despise method; but when he essayed to write about the pretended poet in "The Truth about Blayds," or about the sentimental Miss Melisande Knowle of Hedgeling in his other play "The Romantic Age," he automatically obliged himself to stick to his subject, selecting what was pertinent and ignoring what was not, which in itself is a very positive kind of method.⁹ But even when this is granted, it does not mean that you also agree—any more than Milne does—that a single method may suffice for all playmaking. Each play is different because each interpretation is different, wherefore it seems absurd to suppose that all have been made in the same way.¹⁰

Nevertheless I beg you to consider some contradictory facts—particularly one. Why is it that an established dramatist is generally abler to repeat his successes than he was able to write his first paying play? Why was Edward Sheldon especially able to follow "Salvation Nell" with "The Nigger" and "Romance"? Why did Clyde Fitch spend some ten years tramping Broadway before he disposed of his first success, when in the years that followed his productions averaged about three every twelve months? If there is no growth in technical knowledge, why was Owen Davis's "The Family Cupboard" or "The Detour," which won the Pulitzer prize, an infinitely finer piece of work than "Bertha, the Sewing-Machine Girl"—or, for that matter, why are all of his plays since about 1910 better in quality than his prolific output in the years before? He must have learned, with each new production, some useful lesson in craftsmanship applicable to future work. This artistic growth hints strongly at the existence of interchangeable principles.

⁹ In Milne's printed preface to "The Romantic Age," he says: "I really know nothing about playwriting, and I am only sustained by two beliefs. The first is that rules are always made for other people; the second is that, if a play by me is not obviously by me, and as obviously not by somebody else, then (obviously) I had no business to write it."

¹⁰ See also the section entitled, "Why Good Plays Differ in Structure," in Chapter XXXVI of the present work.

CHAPTER II

THE ART OF PLAYMAKING

THE immediately foregoing does not prove that there is a universal art, but it suggests that to compare successful plays and discover in what respects they resemble one another would be a scientific way of approaching the matter. If there are enough of these common qualities to evolve another successful play through their combined application to fresh material, the existence of a universal art may be conceded. However, I need not attempt here to draw "deadly parallels" with representative plays out of the history of the theater for that already has been done by experienced and learned men familiar in an exhaustive way with the best plays of all time.

The broadest resemblances are stated in a celebrated definition by Brander Matthews, "A play is a composition written by a dramatist to be played in a theater by actors before an audience."¹ But the constructive value of the definition must be deduced from it. It tacitly says that in order that a composition may be a play, it must be actable, capable of presentation under usual theater conditions and intelligible to an audience. These recommendations may be amplified in turn. A certain kind of theater may be prescribed for efficient presentation, actors may be told precisely what they must achieve, and the dramatist's obligation may be detailed. All of which reasoning soon uncovers an illuminating fact.

Whatever is said for theater, actors, or dramatist, refers in the last analysis to the audience, which seems to be the one

¹ Note that the composition is written *with the intention* of performance, and that performance is not compulsory. I agree with Barrett Clark that plays frequently live more truly in the library than they do on the stage. See the footnote dealing with this, on page 74.

free agent. For comfort and convenience of the audience the theater is designed; the actors interpret the play for the benefit of the audience; the dramatist writes for the appreciation of the audience—in short, the audience is the one factor that finally determines a play's success or failure.

LEARNING FROM THE PUBLIC

OLD-TIMERS who, out of their experience have advised the budding playwright to study in the theater, virtually without exception have been careful to explain that the tyro must watch the audience as much as the stage. William H. Crane said very explicitly in an article in the *Sunday Magazine of The New York Tribune*, August 10, 1913, that "unless the audience is won over all dramatic effect is baffled." Henry Arthur Jones declares bluntly in his book "The Theater of Ideas" that the playwright deserves the failure he is bound to meet, however lofty his aims, if he does not "study to please the general body of playgoers." Brander Matthews, in his collection of interesting papers entitled "The Principles of Playmaking," relates an experience with Eugène Nus (author of the French originals of Charles Reade's "Hard Cash," Boucicault's "Streets of New York," and Tom Taylor's "Ticket-of-Leave Man") in which the French playwright told Matthews, "If you want to write for the theater you must go to the theater";² and Matthews, after indorsing the remark, adds that the would-be dramatist "must study earnestly not only the theater itself but the actors—and, above all, the audiences."

"The willingness to learn from the public," said Hartley Manners, author of "Peg o' My Heart," in an interview in *The New York Press*, December 7, 1913, "is perhaps the most valuable attitude of mind in which the young dramatist could approach his profession." Seven days later, in the same paper, William J. Hurlbut, author of "The Fighting Hope," "The Strange Woman," and many other plays, said in another

² The point really is to go continuously to see the same play over and over again. The first view of a good play reveals very little of the art of it, but a prolonged study brings the machinery into sight.

interview that: "The cardinal point in the playwright's craftsmanship, it seems to me, is a willingness to learn from his own, or, if he has not yet had a play produced, from any audience. He must be humble before his audiences and must patiently learn the psychology of an audience. He must learn what an audience reacts to, just what situations or theatrical turns and twists of emphasis it laughs or cries at or applauds."

Whatever the elusive universal art of playmaking may be, it is evident that its principles must be governed by the satisfaction of the audience. This might easily close the discussion. If the universal art of playwriting lies in the whims of audiences—and the magazines credibly inform us that all audiences are capricious—its rules would seem to be too bewilderingly many for any one to learn. But the dramatist really is concerned with only those phenomena that he expressly desires to evoke, which greatly narrows the problem. For instance, if a playwright deliberately requires and uses the proper impulse to produce tears, he need not confuse himself at that moment with the knowledge that spectators sometimes laugh.

In this view of the case it comes within reason to believe that what a dramatist needs most is a knowledge of the various impulses to which audiences respond. This suggests that probably the best book on playwriting is some standard work on psychology—say that of William James—which details the phenomena and operation of the human mind. However that may be, I urge you to re-read William James's "Psychology" as an enlightening exposition of your craft.

The main psychological concerns of the dramatist are to arouse attention and to sustain interest; the lesser considerations care for especial emotional reactions such as laughter, tears, curiosity, fear, and the like.³ As to the devices by which an audience is made to show these emotional symptoms, there is no better place to find them than in the plays by great dramatists in all ages. Aristophanes had his devices as well as George M. Cohan has to-day, Shakespeare no less than Boucicault.

³ For an enumeration of instincts in man see William James, "Psychology," p. 406. But see also Chapter XLI of the present work.

For one who does not care to undertake this study there are critical writings by competent observers in every period, recording first-hand impressions of the means by which contemporaneous playwrights achieved their best effects. Aristotle notes that Euripides presents only portions of the tale of the fall of Troy for his best effect, and that writers who do not select and reject their material have been doomed to failure on the stage; Charles Lamb voices his displeasure over the attempts to reproduce the dresses and the scenery of life on the stage of his time, but opines that "the importunity of the public eye requires it;" Ben Johnson roundly berates Inigo Jones, the great scenic artist of his day, for an alleged statement that "Painting and carpentry are the soul of masque;" Lessing, considering "The Brothers" of Herr Romanus, bewails the state of affairs when a man's plays are known for his name rather than his name for his plays; Matthew Arnold, attending the first performance of "The Silver King," observes that it is neither more nor less than a melodrama, but notes its great merit as an example of its kind—all these casual illustrations merely proving the useful variety of what an earnest student of the drama may find in critical literature.

TWO THOUSAND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

THE consensus of feeling in these observers, whose combined criticisms cover the dramatic work of more than two thousand years, may be summed up for present purposes as follows: A successful dramatist first determines the especial thing he wants to say. Then he selects only those portions of his material that help him to say it. And finally he arranges these for the most effective statement of the whole.

To determine the value of this prescription, it must be tested by the capacity of the average human mind, which is reasonably representative of theatergoers' intelligence. For a dramatist to establish first the main idea he wishes to convey refers itself to the phenomenon that the human mind is able to appreciate one thing at a time best and also that it derives its greatest pleasure in concentration. Because a spec-

tator cannot well divide his attention over unrelated things, it is desirable that the parts of the play shall be parts of a single purpose. Arrangement of the parts for greatest effectiveness means the provision, successively, of certain necessary impulses that the audience may be made to react in particular ways at given times; there shall be a quantity of incident intelligible in the present moment without requiring in the spectator an especial knowledge of past action, this to arouse attention and to imitate the spontaneity of life; there shall be opposition of ideas to awaken interest in the future and so sustain attention; and there shall be sympathy to stir the spectator to that point where he ceases to be a mere witness, and becomes, rather, a direct participant in the action of the play. I shall discuss these things at length later, so don't try to unravel their detailed meaning now. At present I am establishing merely the groundwork of understanding that we may be agreed on the language of craftsmanship when it comes time to apply it.

These observations apparently make up a universal playwriting art, or, in all events, form a practicable basis for one; so the casual impression that might have dismissed the conception in the first place, is not fairly justifiable.

DEATH TO IMAGINATION

IF I have persuaded you that there is an art of playwriting and that it may be mastered by studying audiences as well as plays, you will find yourself in a position from which you will extricate yourself with difficulty. You cannot employ rules, it seems, without abandoning imagination. This is the real objection of those thoughtful persons who are opposed to deliberate method. They acknowledge the common sense of many recommendations for general practice, but fear the paralyzing effect if these are codified. Great writers are heard to declare earnestly that deliberate method is a ball and chain to Pegasus, that it clogs inspiration, that it stirs up a blinding dust just as the vision is about to unfold.

This fear is justifiable and must be respected. I freely confess that imagination must be absolutely free if its evanescent

beauties are to be recorded. It is sad but true that to consider the manner by which a delicate thing is created while it is being done is disruptive to both vision and interpretation. It is a melancholy fact that Pegasus cannot fly with luggage of technique, which really is an alarming conclusion, because every other circumstance that has been examined points to the necessity for all artists to go at once to school.

On the other hand, eminent critics state just as earnestly that deliberate method is the one manner of writing successful plays because it shows up weaknesses to the dramatist before his audience discovers them and damns his drama. They say, besides, that it is a means of improving even good plays. But they are only critics after all, and cannot possibly know as much about it as the great dramatists themselves. Nevertheless, I have found frequently in playwriting that a good way to solve a problem is to phrase it; so let us see what may be done on that basis.

We have arrived at the great paradox. Fine plays—the popular, living plays—all show evidences of sound craftsmanship. How can this be if deliberate method makes successful playwriting impossible?

PHŒNIX

THE fact is that the authors of virtually all of those fine plays *did* use deliberate method; only—and here we have another seeming paradox—they didn't think about it while the inspiration was working. They stocked up with the principles of their art in their apprentice periods, made them second nature and thought of them no more. Marcus Aurelius explained it magnificently centuries ago. "To the wise man," he said, "the dictates of reason seem the instincts of nature."⁴

⁴ "So did the best writers in their beginnings; they imposed upon themselves care and industry; they did nothing rashly; they obtained first to write well, and then custom made it easy and a habit. By little and little their matter showed itself to them more plentifully; their words answered, their composition followed; and all, as in a well-ordered family, presented itself in the place. So the sum of all is that ready writing makes not good writing, but good writing brings on ready writing."—Ben Jonson, "Timber, or Discoveries," edited by Felix E. Schelling, New York, 1892.

"Money Penny"

Nov. 21, 1927

Act III - Scene II

Money Penny and the Prof.

Movement

I - What is Poverty?

(a) Lack of culture? - Prof

(b) Lack of money - M

Climax - Lack of Both

~~Either~~ without the other = Poverty

Sub. scene. Enter Miss
Shima Demonstration
(Not more than a
minute)

II - What is Wealth?

(a) Mental, with just enough back of
it to make it possible (i.e.
to get sufficient comfort and
tranquility)

(b) M. craves nothing if a. is possible
without money
Pictures
Print books etc.

Barent - a cent too
small as
do all want so much
more they really than
we can use
German money
a dream is
a dream

Climax - Wealth is Both

~~Character~~ Demonstration

Sub. scene as above
Mr. Wica. Conversation
about American Vase

III - Summing up.

The state of a world in which money
is the only desideratum a state
now in process of achievement. Loss of

Courtesy of the Author

"SCENE MOVEMENT" FROM "MR. MONEYPENNY"
BY CHANNING POLLOCK

Mr. Pollock's method is described elsewhere. Concerning the present illustration he writes: "This is the first sketch of the 'movement' of a scene. Experience with suits alleging plagiarism has taught me to write the name of the play on every page, together with the date on which what that page holds was set down." From this "movement" or trend of a scene, Mr. Pollock develops his first draft of dialogue.

The great men who earnestly deny deliberate method while showing all evidences of its use, just never have realized the forces that shaped their own professional characters. They underwent a natural selection of their best abilities, unconscious of it all the while. The great genius, who writes merely as natural feeling bids, has invariably developed and corrected that natural feeling earlier in some fortunate but haphazard combination of circumstances. The Greek poet, Alcman, who flourished in the seventh century B. C., said of himself that "he sang like the birds"—that is, was self-taught; but that made no exception of him because even birds have to pass through their fledgling, habit-forming period. And if there is especial force in such statement from a poet who exults in freedom, I quote, in rebuttal, William Wordsworth's repeated praises in verse of the value of constraint and disadvantages of "too much liberty" and of "unchartered freedom." It is virtually impossible for any one to perform an unaccustomed act expertly the first time, while, on the other hand, the laws of habit teach us that an act is easier to perform after having been done several times.⁵

Radicals and die-hards are both right. The dramatist is not compelled to choose between his muse and method. He may have both if he will take them in order instead of together. He should study his art first, forget its instances, and, becoming persuaded of its principles, should adopt these as the instincts of good habit. Thereupon he may give his muse full attention and understand her profoundly. You see, the acquisition of technique is naturally succeeded by actual writing; but by suddenly deciding in adult life to write plays when perhaps it never occurred to you before, you are trying to give attention to technique and playwriting simultaneously; so of course it's confusing. The ideal arrangement would be for a master to have taken you say at

⁵ "In the acquisition of a new habit or leaving off of an old one, we must take care to launch ourselves with as strong and decided an initiative as possible. Accumulate all the possible circumstances which shall reënforce the right motives; put yourself assiduously in conditions that encourage the new way; make engagements incompatible with the old; take a public pledge, if the case allows; in short, envelop your resolution with every aid you know. . . . Never suffer an exception to occur till the new habit is firmly rooted in your life."—William James, "Psychology," p. 145.

about the age of fourteen and led you gradually through the preliminary mazes of the priesthood. I speak of it that way because first dramatists were regarded as religious ministers.⁶

The accidental, matured genius in all sincerity urges the youngster to throw away his books and simply write. For him, looking backward, the advice has seemed tested and true. For the youngster, looking forward, the advice is likely to be fatal, for he will now shut eyes and ears to all the lessons, even of experience.

Any writer confronted suddenly with a lot of strange imposing principles must expect to be overwhelmed. They bound his horizon; and for the time he believes with all his heart that his imagination has been destroyed. But if he persists in his understanding and practical application, and keeps horse sense rather than hysteria uppermost, he will find the technique slowly subordinating itself and his visions returning by the same degrees. It is with technique as with certain royal commands. Francis Bacon, in his "Apothegms," relates that "Queen Elizabeth was wont to say of her instructions to great officers, 'That they were like to garments, strait at the first putting on, but did by and by wear loose enough.'"⁷ Remember the old saying—that one gets used to everything but hanging.

This matter of studying phenomena and remembering only the generalizations of truth about them is no unreasonable trick for the human creature of habit. We adapt ourselves without thinking to, for instance, the law of gravitation. We have been accustomed to it by falls and falling objects all our lives. The pianist long ago learned the mysteries of his keyboard, and hence now is undisturbed by them when he plays his reveries. The painter has been trained in the chemistry and blending of colors, in perspective and chiaroscuro, long before producing his masterpieces of vision. The expert

⁶ James observes that, "The period between twenty and thirty is the critical one in the formation of intellectual and professional habits." He remarks also that, "We see professional mannerisms settling on the young commercial traveler or doctor, or minister, already at the age of twenty-five."—*Ibid.*, 143f.

⁷ In William James's "Psychology," notably in his chapter entitled "Will," he proves conclusively over and over again, that new thoughts, that require an effort of will to keep them before the mind, remain there without effort after there is unobstructed consent to their presence.

dramatist consciously or unconsciously has learned fundamental truths in the days of his struggle for recognition; and his present mastery is the expression of the code of truth that now is woven into his character. It is a fact generally accepted that the operations of the hands may be reduced to formulæ, but not so with the operation of the mind, probably because it is not directly visible. Nevertheless, it is beyond dispute that there is such a thing as a dramatic habit of mind.

The desire of most persons to learn and master instantly, their failure to realize the necessary time interval between initiation into and mastery of art, has led to the pernicious half-truth that "Genius requires no teaching." Genius is the quality of the full-fledged artist; and of course he requires no teaching because he already has served his apprenticeship. The aforesaid slogan of that irresponsible group that would open the field of art to any incompetent who chooses to hang out his shingle, always should carry a corollary explaining that before genius comes preparation and prayer.

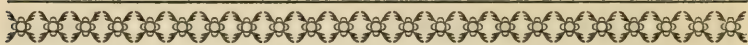
Humbleness, patience, industry—these are virtues in a playwright. There is the student's close attention, the willingness to wait—for in the calendar of time a thousand years is but the flicker of an eyelid—and honest, conscientious toil, for there is no highroad to lasting achievement. As William Thompson Price, my old teacher, used to say, "There is no large brass key that unlocks the doors to dramatic art."

The study takes time. It takes considerably less time studying this way than by groping for one's self, but the period is long enough either way. There are reasonable parallels, however, suggested by that dramatist who was asked to come over some afternoon and tell a class how to write plays. He replied that they had better also invite a physician some other afternoon to teach them the practice of medicine. I have worked desultorily at this book for a period of fifteen years, which means that I must have weighed the conclusions here set down; yet I can find almost anywhere intelligent men who never thought particularly about the subject, but who nevertheless are willing to dispose of it in a three-minute conversation. No other paying profession may be learned

in much less than the four years of a college course; and the average time between a playwright's first play and his first production is ten years. I am frank, you see.

That there is much to be said explains why this book is fat. It is a book on playwriting and expects the reader literally to work his way through it. For the man who has started to read it just for entertainment, I, as the author, candidly advise him to take it back and buy a novel—without telling him my opinion of a would-be dramatist who expects to survive after ten years knocking at the theater door and is too impatient to peruse a guide-book.

But at this moment the doors of Art stand ajar. Let us enter the temple.



CHAPTER III

THE STAGE WAY

ONE of the first obligations of a person essaying to write stage plays is manifestly to study the conditions in which the works are to be performed, considering the public to which he is to make his appeal and the system of distribution through which that public is to be reached.

This study must be constant because the aspect of the theater is continually changing. Severance of diplomatic relations will throw certain plays on alien subjects into the discard in the twinkling of an eye; beginning of recruiting or mobilization of troops, or an actual declaration of war may cause peremptory withdrawal of dramas that advocate peace, and shifts in fads and other modifications, more or less important, occur with the passing of a few short hours. Knowing this the dramatist becomes aware that unless his study is unceasing it is valueless.¹

The stage has at least two fundamental aspects, however, that may be appreciated once and for all, and these are the facts that it makes its appeal almost wholly to the eye and the ear. There have been instances in which perfumes have been introduced into the auditorium ventilators to influence the audience's sense of smell; but this is an unimportant addition.

APPEAL TO THE EYE

THE visual part of drama has been esteemed since the dawn of its recorded history.² In "The Principles of Playmaking"

¹ See Chapter XLI, "What the Public Wants."

² "Action is speaking to the eyes; and all Europe over, plays have been represented with great applause in a tongue unknown and sometimes without any language at all."—Thomas Rymer's "Short View of Tragedy," in Spingarn's "Critical Essays of the 17th Century."

Brander Matthews has this to say in point: "It has been asserted that if 'Hamlet' could be performed in a deaf-and-dumb asylum the inmates would be able to follow the story with interest by means of their eyes alone. A wise critic once declared that the skeleton of a good play is a pantomime. 'Tartuffe' for example is Molière's masterpiece, a marvelously rich portrayal of human nature; and it has a pantomime for its backbone. When the Comédie-Française went to London, forty years ago, Sarcey picked out 'Tartuffe' as the one play of all the repertory that produced the most certain effect upon the English playgoers, since its story was so clear that it could be followed even by those ignorant of French."

The gripping moments in all plays, either for stage or screen, are unspoken. The gripping moments in life are those that pass without words—the farewell when the voice is too choked for utterance, the silent expressions of sympathy or contempt. That celebrated scene in "Shore Acres" wherein old Nat fixes the fire for the night, lights his lamp and goes upstairs to bed, occupies several pages of James A. Herne's manuscript describing just what the old man is thinking during all his "business." Pilar Morin has said that in the pantomime, "L'Enfant Prodigue," there are "22,000 inwardly spoken words."

The veteran manager, Charles Burnham, in a series of articles in *The Saturday Evening Post* several years ago, provided an admirable illustration of the greater force of pantomime. He was recording one of Mme. Bernhardt's performances in English: "One evening, when she had a particularly enthusiastic audience, Maurice Grau spoke of it. She smilingly told him that she did not believe they possibly understood what they were applauding. 'Possibly not the language,' said Grau, 'but your acting speaks all languages.' 'If that is so,' replied Bernhardt, 'I might go on the stage and repeat any lines from any play.' And she did, giving a speech from 'Adrienne' in the midst of 'La Tosca,' much to the astonishment of her company, who did not know what to make of the seeming forgetfulness of her memory. And how she would act that interpolated speech!—while the audience between acts would discuss her acting, saying, 'Never

saw the Madame play better.' She was not the only artist to do this. I have known Edwin Booth to introduce long speeches from 'Othello' into some other Shakespearean parts that he was playing."

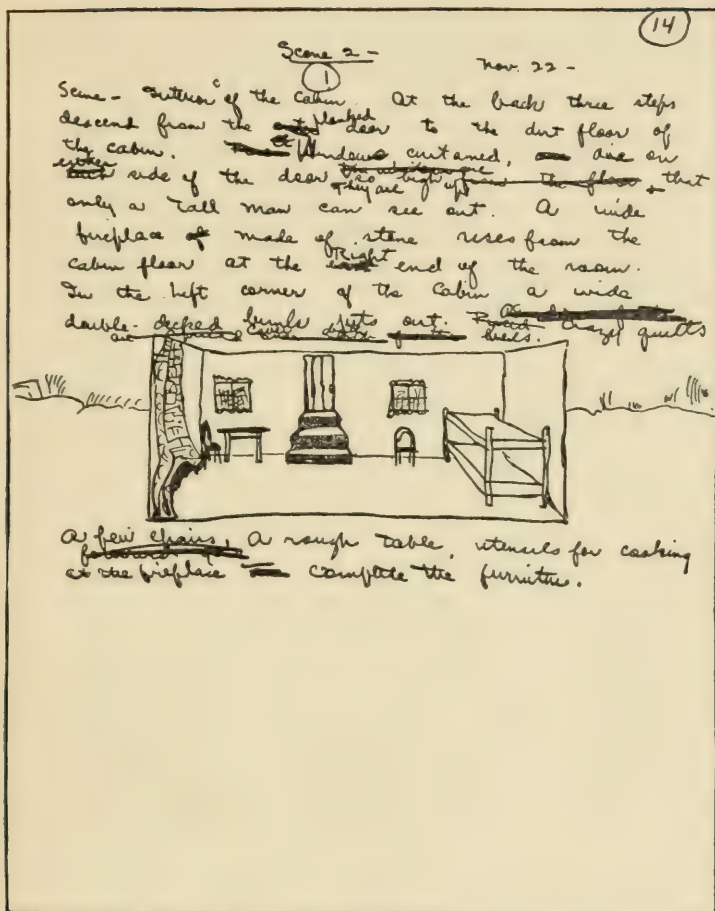
One day, some dozen years ago at least, I encountered Mark Swan on the street. Swan has written more farces than you could shake a stick at, and has proved his professional dexterity by composing successful plays of other kinds. (Since this paragraph was written he has composed also an interesting and honest book on playwriting.)³ Yet, on this day, he could talk of little else but a striking motto he had found, and which he had placed on the wall above his desk. The magic line was "Show—not tell." "I've written a number of scenes in which characters come in and tell about what happened outside," he said; "but it's wrong. The audience wants to see what's going on. It shouldn't have happened outside but right on the stage where everybody could see it."⁴ Swan can't object to my telling this because it happened a long time ago, and proves to his honor that in his success he is open-minded.

He hit the nail squarely on the head. Visual action gives the audience its money's worth. The spectator has paid to see the show; and he wants to be in on everything that happens. This throws some light on the good sense of the old rule of acting that the gesture must precede the speech. The gesture is the direct, visual appeal; the speech is merely the confirmation.

Visual treatment is the best way to prove points in drama. You may have the villain declare over and over again that he has done a good act; but the only way for the audience to believe it will be for them to see him do it. You may do an impossible thing in a plausible way in the theater; and the audience will condemn the objections because they actually have seen it with their own eyes. They know it's true be-

³ "How You Can Write Plays," New York, 1927.

⁴ "The dramatic poet, as well as the epic, represents external events, but he represents them as real and present."—"Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature," by August W. Schlegel, translated by John Black, 2nd edition, London, 1909 (Lecture III).



Courtesy of Barrett H. Clark

FROM THE MS. OF "BIG LAKE" BY LYNN RIGGS

The original pages of this tragedy, first produced at the American Laboratory Theater, New York, in April, 1927, strikingly reveal the author's working state of mind. Here and there are adjurations to himself to treat given scenes thus-and-so; dates mark the periods of his inspiration, and special times, like Thanksgiving, have notations of his holiday thoughts. Mr. Riggs is a new-comer to the theater; but his authorship of "Big Lake," "A Lantern to See By," "Sump'n Like Wings" and "The Domino Parlor" stamp him a writer of great promise.

cause they were there when it happened. "Seeing is believing." ⁵

Another important service rendered by visual treatment is its strong part in creation of what William Gillette has called "The illusion of the first time." ⁶ That is, an ideal condition in the theater is when the spectators have the sense that this particular time, when they are present, is the first time the story has unfolded itself. It all seems spontaneous. They are witnessing a course of events the end to which, so far as their feeling goes, is as uncertain as to-morrow in their own lives. The visual incident is *now*, in the present tense, and therefore, it seems, never can have happened before, and can have no real predetermination. ⁷

EAR APPEAL

I HAVE cited a number of proofs that visual treatment is stronger dramatically than narrative treatment. Now I hope to explain why. A visual presentation is a direct appeal to the mind of the spectator through his sense of sight; a spoken or printed word is merely a symbol meaning something else that must be translated by the mind into the terms of the especial sense to which it refers. We may give a direct mental impression by showing a hurdy-gurdy playing in front of a beautiful building; but to describe them would require translation of the word "hurdy-gurdy" by the mind for the benefit of the ear, and translation of the word "building" for the

⁵ "Those which a tale shall through the ear impart
With fainter characters impress the heart
Than those which, subject to the eye's broad gaze,
The pleased spectator to himself conveys."

—Horace, "Art of Poetry." Translated by Howes. In "The Art of Poetry; the Poetical Treatises of Horace, Vida, and Boileau," edited by Albert S. Cook, Boston, 1892.

⁶ "The Illusion of the First Time in Acting," by William Gillette, with an introduction by George Arliss. An address delivered at the fifth joint-session of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and of the National Institute of Arts and Letters at Chicago, November 14, 1913. The Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, New York. 1915.

⁷ The pantomimic method may be overdone, too. As soon as the spectator is conscious of the pantomime, then it probably is wrong. An actor may convey the idea of a disbelief in God by pointing heavenward, throwing a Bible to the floor and stamping on it; but certainly a recourse to words instead, would be more reasonable and technically more economical.

benefit of the eye. Of course, we make these translations almost instantly; but the fact remains that a translation is necessary—and hence the appeal that way is secondary. Sight is always quicker than hearing save when the appeal is sound for its own sake, such as a crash of glass, because sound then is an exclusively ear appeal.

The direct ear appeal is of sound alone. What that sound stands for is a matter of interpretation and therefore a secondary process. It is said that Dante Gabriel Rossetti could so manipulate his voice that he could bring tears to the eyes of his friends merely by reading a restaurant menu; and certain it is in the course of our daily lives, that even inexplicable sounds can stir us to emotional depths. The power of music is proverbial. And the actor's voice thus becomes a flexible instrument in the theater apart from the words he is called upon to utter.

A spoken word has only an incidental sound value. The idea it expresses, for which it is merely a symbol, requires translation just as much as though the word was printed in a book. This will enable you to see, incidentally, that a motion picture, appealing directly to the mind through sight, has a stronger force than a novel, which deals exclusively in verbal symbols, and is almost as strong in its subtitles as the stage with its speech, because speech in the main consists of verbal symbols, too. So perhaps this vaunted superiority of the stage through its advantage of speech is not quite so strong as at first appeared.

A story is related of Sir James M. Barrie at a play rehearsal conducted by Granville Barker. It runs substantially as follows: Barker had just told an actor to lean over the back of a chair and convey with his expression that he had a brother who was a large shipowner in Sunderland. Barrie thereupon suggested that the actor also convey in pantomime that he had "a red-headed brother who drinks port in Shropshire."

THE OTHER SENSES

PSYCHOLOGISTS tell us that we form complete conceptions of objects only when we have seen, heard, tasted, touched and

smelled them.⁸ Our conception cannot go beyond this because we have no other senses to which an object may appeal. Indeed, it is within reason to suppose that familiar objects may have unknown aspects that we cannot appreciate on that account. There *may*, for instance, be a fourth dimension. But once we have formed what we call a complete conception, a repeated appeal to any one of the senses concerned will provide a clue from which we may reconstruct with our minds the entire fabric. I have a reasonably complete conception of the typewriting machine upon which I write these pages. I may be in a distant room and hear some one else clicking the keys. This would give me the clue by means of which I might tell you without changing my position, what the machine looks like.

A story is told authoritatively about a man who was born blind but who grew to manhood with all of his other senses in normal action. An operation was performed and his sight restored. As the surgeons were about to remove the bandages from his eyes, a physician who was rather curious about the man's conception of things in general entered the room. As the bandages were lifted the physician held a pencil before the patient's eyes. "I want you to tell me what this is," he asked. The man looked at the pencil with intense curiosity, then stretched out his hands to touch it; but the physician held the pencil out of his reach and insisted that he answer by using his eyes alone. The man tried with great earnestness and then was obliged to give it up. "For all I know," he said, "it may be a horse!" His conception of a pencil was incomplete so far as sight was concerned. Had he held it in his hands, or touched it, he could have identified it instantly.

In the regular theater we may make a direct appeal to the mind through only two of the five senses, namely sight and hearing, but we may reach the remaining three by means of visual symbols which the mind may translate for their bene-

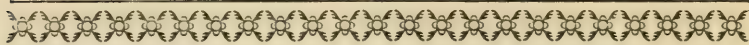
⁸ As long ago as 1749, Diderot, in his "Letter on the Blind," tried to show the dependence of men's ideas on their five senses by considering the case of the intellect deprived of one.

fit.⁹ We do not go to the theater primarily to stroke a cat, eat a salad or inhale perfume, but indirectly we may do all these things before we leave. The sight of a boy sucking a lemon thus is likely to pucker our own mouths; the sight of a collision may make us recoil involuntarily from what is but a fancied shock to ourselves; a view of an executioner running his appraising finger over the newly whetted blade of his ax may cause us to shudder at the purely imagined feel of that razor edge, and the mere mention of violets in certain circumstances may conjure for us their absent fragrance. The distinctions that isolate drama and all the other forms of art may be superficial after all.¹⁰

To show how the several senses may be reached in the most effective way is the important work of pages to come.

⁹ Miss Jane Ellen Harrison, in her splendid handbook, "Ancient Art and Ritual" (London, 1913, beginning p. 131), raises some interesting thought in this connection when she says: "It has been noted that two, and only two, of our senses are the channels of art and give us artistic material. These two senses are sight and hearing. Touch, and its special modifications, taste and smell, do not go to the making of art. Sight and hearing are the distant senses—not direct contacts. Others are too immediate—too vital."

¹⁰ For those who are interested in collateral reading on this subject, I suggest Raymond Holder Wheeler's "The Synæsthesia of a Blind Subject," in *The University of Oregon Publications*, Vol. I, No. 5. This deals with the manner in which blind persons interpret impressions that they do not know themselves, but that they hear about from those who see. The author refers to A. Grafé's "Note sur un nouveau cas d'audition colorée" (in *Rev. de Med.*, 1897, XVII), in which it is suggested that by making use of "colored hearing" and like phenomena, the blind may be made to see and the deaf to hear. Another interesting record is in *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for January, 1837, pp. 47-52. This, a communication from F. H. Brett, is entitled, "Concerning certain interesting phenomena manifested in individuals born blind, and in those having little or no recollection of that sense on their being restored to sight at various periods of life." See also John McKendrick's "Are the Senses Ever Vicarious?" a letter to *Nature*, London, 1909, Vol. 80, p. 38. The contention here is that the limited senses of those partially deprived do not become more acute from practice, but that the blind, for instance, merely pay more attention to senses that most of us neglect.



PART TWO

AUDIENCE DEMANDS

CHAPTER IV

THE AUDIENCE DECIDES

IN WRITING the play countless people will cite rules which they say you must obey," said Roi Cooper Megrue in an interview in *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 26, 1916. "I think there is but one rule. That you must always follow—to grip your audience's interest and not to loosen that grip." The clever and prolific author of "Under Cover," "It Pays to Advertise," and many other plays, never made a more naïve remark. Continuously to interest the audience is the aim of all dramatic art, and by extension includes all the valid principles of playmaking. And although Megrue unquestionably discovered this for himself, the same truth has been found in one way or another by every successful dramatist who ever lived. Molière, for instance, said in his "Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes" that, "There is no other rule of the theater than that of pleasing the public."¹

Samuel Johnson, certainly an astute critic if not a very successful dramatist, referred to the truth in the prologue he

¹ Add to this the remark of Boileau in his preface to "Bérénice": "I wished to know whether the tragedy had bored them, and learned that they all admitted that it had not, but had moved them, and that they would willingly witness it again. What more could they demand? I begged them to think well enough of themselves not to believe that a play which stirs them and gives them pleasure can be absolutely at variance with the rules. The principal rule is to please and to stir; all others are simply means to arrive at that end."—Translation of Barrett H. Clark in his "European Theories of the Drama." This useful work is a digest of all the important Old World dissertations on playmaking from Aristotle to William Archer. Cincinnati, 1918.

wrote for the opening of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, under the management of David Garrick:

Hard is his lot that there by fortune placed,
Must watch the wild vicissitudes of taste;
With every meteor of caprice must play,
And chase the new-blown bubbles of the day.
Ah! let not censure term our fate our choice,
The stage but echoes back the public voice;
The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,
For we that live to please must please to live.

The usual quotation from this prologue covers just the final couplet here; but I have given a bit more because it seems to show that the great lexicographer admitted the truth reluctantly, and I don't want to drag him in as an illustration against his will.

TABLES OF THE LAW

"THE word play carries with it the idea of an audience," said the distinguished French critic Francisque Sarcey in his weekly department of the Paris *Temps* in 1876. "We cannot conceive of a play without an audience. Take one after another the accessories which serve in the performance of a dramatic work . . . they all can be replaced or suppressed except that one. It is an indubitable fact that a dramatic work, whatever it may be, is designed to be listened to by a number of persons united and forming an audience that is its very essence, that is a necessary condition of its existence. As far back as you can go in the history of the theater, in all countries and in all ages, the men who have ventured to give a representation of life in dramatic form have begun by gathering the spectators. Thespis around his chariot as Dumas around his 'Étrangère.' It is with a public in view that they have composed their works and had them performed. This then we can insist on: No audience no play. The audience is the necessary and inevitable condition to which dramatic art must accommodate its means. I emphasize this point of departure, because from this simple fact we

can derive all the laws of the theater without a single exception."²

WHAT IS A THEATER FOR?

THE first step to provide an audience with the peculiar pleasure it seeks in the theater is to know just what that pleasure is.

In the first place, why do people find pleasure in the theater at all? Aristotle says:

The instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures; and through imitation he learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. We have evidence of this in the facts of experience. Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies. The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, and not only to philosophers but to men in general; whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited. Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, "Ah, that is he." For if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the limitation as such, but to the execution, the coloring, or some such other cause.³

It would be interesting to trace in detail the rise of dramatic art among primitive peoples, and to prove its spon-

² "A Theory of the Theater," by Francisque Sarcey, with an introduction by Brander Matthews. The Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, New York, 1916. For the psychology of audiences see especially the article, "Suggestion," by William McDougall, in the 11th *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Vol. XXVI, p. 48c; also, Gustave Le Bon, "Psychology of the Crowd" (English translation); Gerald Stanley Lee, "Crowds," 1913; Karl Groos, "The Play of Man" (English translation), New York, 1901; and Yrjö Hirn, "The Origins of Art," London, 1900.

³ "The Poetics of Aristotle," edited with critical notes and a translation by S. H. Butcher. Fourth edition, London, 1911: "To what end the hard work of dramatic form?" asks Lessing in his "Hamburg Dramaturgie" (No. 80). "Why build a theater, disguise men and women, torture their memories, invite the whole town to assemble at one place if I intend to produce nothing more with my work and its representation, than some of those emotions that would be produced as well by any good story that every one could read by his chimney-corner at home? The dramatic form is the only one by which pity and fear can be excited, at least in no other form can these passions be excited to such a degree."

taneous creation in unrelated parts of the globe—and it would be entirely possible, for modern research has learned far more about primitive man than Aristotle could have known—but such description would carry us far afield when time is precious. It will be more to the present purpose if we accept the theater audience as constituted thus and so without attempting to explain why, and agree that its idiosyncrasies—at which we cannot reasonably cavil because they simply *are*, and being human nature, cannot be altered by any act of ours—must be played upon deftly, like oddly arranged strings of some mighty harp, to obtain the harmony we desire.⁴ Yet I want to state that there are reasons why the audience is constituted as it is; and if you wish to know them, I refer you to that admirable book “The Development of the Drama” by Brander Matthews, which will refer you, in turn, to many others.

I would say that the first quality sought by an audience in the theater is something to compel its attention. Attention is a concentration of the mind, with all its faculties, on something within range that for the time is more compelling than anything else. A shriek for help in a peaceful field would be arresting, whereas it might pass unnoticed in Herculaneum when Vesuvius is vomiting smoke and lava. Attention in the theater may be called by physical combat, a ringing doorbell, a word spoken, the rumble of thunder, or anything else that is worthier of attention than what previously occupied the audience's mind. The action that arrests attention is not necessarily physical movement. It may be any significant matter freshly brought up. Moreover, attention may be sustained merely by a succession of unrelated bids for it, so long as they are compelling. The audience at the vaudeville theater finds interest in a heterogeneous mixture of trained

⁴ People attend the theater seemingly because of the relaxation it affords in opening a safety-valve for their emotions. This seems to explain why theaters are attended so well in tense periods, during war, for instance. Goethe one time laughingly remarked, according to his “Conversations,” that his children returned from the theater in a much better humor than formerly because at Kotzebue's play “For once and away they can have a good cry.” All of us are better beings for getting emotion *out of us* now and then. Which proves the shrewdness of Aristotle's statement about tragedy *purging* the feelings through pity and fear.

seals, monologists, singers of topical songs, and acrobats; and certainly one could not truthfully say that vaudeville theaters are unpopular. A theatrical offering that is sufficiently diverting in its very variety—take, for example, the “Ziegfeld Follies” or the familiar Broadway musical show with its interpolated numbers—will satisfy the stronger cravings of audiences for entertainment.

VOLUNTARY ATTENTION

It is imperative, however, that these appeals shall be direct. That is, the appeal to the eye must happen directly before the eye, as that to the ear must sound at close range. The other provision is that the appeals must happen successively and not all together. In the chapter on “Attention” in William James’s “Psychology,” he cites experiment after experiment proving conclusively that dispersed attention is difficult to the human mind. “When data are so disconnected that we have no conception which embraces them together,” he says, “it is much harder to apprehend several of them at once, and the mind tends to let go of one whilst it attends to another.”⁵ There is a seeming contradiction of this point as applied to audiences, in the method of the three-ring circus; but the principle there is merely to give the audience the effect of the spectacular with enough action at close range to engage attention. Indeed, the masters of the circus themselves seem to recognize the danger of diffused attention. If you have attended the circus in late years, you doubtless have noticed that the various acts in the rings repeat their performances several times in different places on the tanbark to give the spectators other opportunities to see what they have missed in attending something else.

I have heard directors rehearsing blatant forms of entertainment, insist on “something new every minute,” which is exactly my point. By arresting attention afresh every minute it is possible to divert; but it does not give the highest

⁵ “Psychology,” by William James, American Science Series, Briefer Course, New York, 1892. The common objection to persons talking or coughing or otherwise making themselves conspicuous on the public side of the footlights during performance is convenient proof that audiences do like to concentrate.

form of dramatic stimulation. To hold the attention without compelling it again, is certainly a finer sort of craftsmanship. The clown who compels his audience first by hitting one character on the head with a bladder, and then, when the interest begins to lag, hits another with the slapstick, is not gaining nearly so much as he is when he puts both feet through one leg of his wide trousers and leads the audience to speculate on his manner of escape. In the first case, he is shocking the audience to attention; in the second, he has aroused their voluntary interest. Here we are on the borderline between elementary drama and the next-best kind. The first instance shows the audience attentive because it *has* to be, and the second shows it attentive because it *wants* to be.

The illustration, that I have just cited, of the clown trying to escape from one leg of his trousers, points to the importance of what usually is called suspense, but which, for purposes of greater flexibility may be called simple curiosity. An audience likes to have its attention compelled and then its further interest intrigued by the desire to know more about the object of attention. Curiosity gives us the popular forms of entertainment known as the detective story and the mystery play; and yet it is not all-sufficient. With all the cleverness of "Seven Keys to Baldpate" and "The Bat," they never can rank in popularity with "The Old Homestead" or "Shore Acres." The reason is that curiosity is essentially a cold emotion. Now and then the audience at the mystery play is impelled to cry out at the force of a shocking event; but on the whole its interest is much that of a person solving a puzzle. Attention is directed in the main to the outcome; and the interest in the present moment comes chiefly from unexpected turns of the plot that upset calculations. The element of surprise is but a part, and a comparatively small part of dramatic effect. Certainly when we go back, a second time, to see a play that we have liked, we do not gain much surprise. What we do find constant is sympathy—the highest degree of interest.⁶

⁶ Yeats is said to have given Dunsany his first, and only, lesson in play-writing. "Surprise . . . is what is necessary. Surprise, and then more surprise, and that is all."—Barrett Clark, "A Study of the Modern Drama," p. 319.

SYMPATHY

STRONGER than curiosity is sympathy. Sympathy is one of the greatest forces in life. It animates and holds together the brotherhood of man. In operation in the theater it lifts us soonest out of ourselves and opens the floodgates of our emotions. Aristotle was close to the truth when he said that a dramatist should purge the emotions through pity and fear. The dramatist who awakens sympathy has in his hands the power to lead his audience to glory or to destruction. He who reaches the head through the heart inevitably has greater power than he who appeals to the head directly. "He is indeed the true enchanter," said Irving, writing in his "Sketch Book" of Stratford-on-Avon, "whose spell operates not upon the senses, but upon the imagination and the heart." It is striking to note that in the history of the theater the bulk of enduring plays are not the startling novelties but the everyday, humanly true. Indeed, the humanly true is most difficult to write. As Mark Twain explains it, "Truth is stranger than Fiction, for Fiction is obliged to stick to probability, and Truth ain't."

Sympathy is the power that, when used with taste and discrimination, is called "human interest;" when overdone it is a welter of sloppy sentiment that is more degrading than elevating. But it is so all-powerful that, whether we aim to teach through the medium or try merely to entertain, we must defer to its requirements or fall short of the best effect. The art of the theater is an emotional system; and we may as well accept that fact frankly.

The great power of the theater is that it produces that ideal condition wherein the spectator ceases to be a mere witness of events and becomes a direct participant in the action. While he is wrapped in the circumstances of the representation—out of himself, as it were—the dramatist may guide him at a touch. But let the interest or the sympathy lag for just one moment and the spell will be broken. The dramatist will have to compel attention all over again, and by degrees coax the spectator back into the world of illusion. In my opinion the recognition of this power is one of the outstanding dis-

coveries of modern theater-craft. It has been known before; but it took this age of psychological investigation to hail it as a guiding principle. The spellbound audience is the first consideration of Arthur Hopkins in the production of plays. In his little book, "How's Your Second Act?" (New York, 1918), he thus explains the basis of his idea of what he calls, for want of a better term, "Unconscious Projection:" "Complete illusion has to do entirely with the unconscious mind. Except in the case of certain intellectual plays, the theater is wholly concerned with the unconscious mind of the audience. The conscious mind should play no part."⁷

I have spoken on an earlier page of the importance of what Gillette has called, "the illusion of the first time." One of the most difficult, perhaps *the* most difficult, thing in play-writing or play production is to view work that is finally arranged with the same uninformed viewpoint as the audience to which the work should come entirely new. Yet in no other way may the dramatist or the producer anticipate and prejudge effects. It is the same difficulty that presents itself when one seeks to predetermine public opinion in any other line.

I have said attention, then curiosity, and then sympathy. Attention is a necessary factor. We may have theatrical offerings with attention alone, as vaudeville or the revue; but plays depending on curiosity must have attention, too, although they may not have sympathy. Sympathetic plays must employ attention, and I am inclined to think that they require curiosity as well, for wholly to arouse sympathy implies a condition of injustice which should be corrected. For example, the over-worked objects of sympathy, the widows and the orphans and the helpless puppies, convince the spectator at once that they need protection.

Curiosity presupposes a state of affairs that is in solution, because it is a desire to know more. What the audience desires is a most potent factor in dramatic effect. When the audience desires something greatly and we give it the prospect of not getting it, we have suspense. We may make the

⁷ See also the further discussion of this point in Chapter XVI, under the subheading, "The Force of Aroused Emotion."

prospect dark only in proportion to the audience's desire for success of the sympathetic side; to transcend that is to make the audience despair and end its interest. Curiosity is not merely an inquisitiveness on the part of the audience; it has been piqued by the unsettled circumstances of the stage story. Therefore, it is more than a simple curiosity; it is a doubt as to issue plus a specific desire to know the outcome. When an audience's curiosity covers these points we are able to say that a play has suspense. And when we add sympathy to this, we give curiosity a direction upon which attention may focus.

Both curiosity and sympathy call for, or at least suggest, a state of affairs in which there is doubt as to outcome. Doubt as to outcome implies an opposition of ideas, because without contending forces there can be no uncertainty. So we may say that in a play that employs the full facilities of the medium of expression—that has suspense and sympathy—there must be, potentially at least, elements of opposition. The condition is not one that audiences seek directly, perhaps; but it is a necessary circumstance to either curiosity or sympathy which audiences unquestionably do seek.



CHAPTER V

A PHILOSOPHY OF PLEASURE

THE notion that a dramatic action must involve a conflict is very old, and very well sustained; but I prefer to state it in a milder way. We may have theatrical entertainments without opposing elements of any kind; we may have good plays in which there is no active conflict, but merely contrast, which is perhaps the simplest form of opposition. So many plays written with a "purpose" depend on contrast for their effectiveness, such as: this man followed the proper path, and O, see how he has succeeded, while that man took the evil highroad, and Shame, how he has failed! But this method lacks full dramatic force because the respective pilgrimages are not united in a single issue for focused attention, which actual opposition would give. In "Playmaking" William Archer vigorously opposes the idea that struggle is an *essential* characteristic of drama,¹ and, I believe, rightly. At the same time I am convinced that active opposition is a characteristic of any drama that uses the full resources of the theater.

The necessity of opposition is felt very keenly by those actually engaged in the theater. Time and time again I have heard workers there who probably never heard of written theories of the drama, say that a given play was unsatisfactory because it had no "clash" or no "menace." Myron Stearns adds to this that he once knew a motion picture director who couldn't even articulate it, but who had the idea just the

¹ "Playmaking, a Manual of Craftsmanship," by William Archer. Boston, 1912. Archer cites Hauptmann's "Hannele" as an example of a successful play without struggle; but, as Clark suggests, in his "Study of the Modern Drama," p. 79, the child heroine struggles "with death, with her environment, with the powers of evil—even though these are not personified."

same. He went around the stage complaining that the play upon which he was working had no "memace." This observation barely was placed upon record here when another director sat in my office uttering complaints about the "menance" in his job.

SUSTAINED ATTENTION

THERE is one more important observation to be made about what an audience demands. That is the matter of unity. We have it on the word of almost every important dramatic critic that audiences prefer but one story in a play, no more no less. "Unity of plot," says Aristotle (*"Poetics,"* VIII), "does not, as some persons think, consist in the unity of the hero. For infinitely various are the incidents in one man's life which cannot be reduced to unity; and so, too, there are many actions of one man out of which we cannot make one action." He then proceeds to explain that in a single plot, "the structural union of the parts is such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed."

This is all very true; but the reason given by Aristotle that a beautiful thing must have magnitude and order, is scarcely sufficient. The importance of unity to an audience is that it provides all the materials for the pleasure to be derived from sustained attention. In sustained attention the audience may give its fullest, most concentrated emotional response, while the experience in itself is a stimulating adventure. The average person rarely enjoys sustained attention of his own creation. "There is no such thing as voluntary attention sustained for more than a few seconds at a time," says William James, adding a bit later that: "The object must change. When it is one of sight, it will actually become invisible; when of hearing, inaudible—if we attend to it too unmovingly."

"The natural tendency of attention when left to itself is to wander to ever new things," he continues, quoting Helmholtz; "and so soon as the interest of its object is over, so soon as nothing new is to be noticed there, it passes, in

spite of our will, to something else. If we wish to keep it upon one and the same object, we must seek constantly to find out something new about the latter.' ” And then James observes that this faculty of finding new phases in a subject is a characteristic of what is called genius, concluding that, “Now we can see why it is that what is called sustained attention is the easier, the richer in acquisitions, and the fresher and more original the mind.”

In a well-made play, in which the subject is single and the successive incidents are merely its ramifications, the audience is imperceptibly led along the smooth and consistent course that some master intellect would follow spontaneously. The pleasure of the theater is very largely the stimulating pleasure of clear, logical thinking without the spectator's effort to originate. I think that this probably is the principal reason why an audience prefers unity of a play's action.²

The same considerations recommended by William James in his “Talks to Teachers on Psychology,” are valuable to dramatists in addressing audiences. “There is no reception in the mind of the child without reaction,” he says—although I do not for a moment mean to imply that the mind of the audience is that of a child—“and no impression without a corresponding expression. There is only one way of insuring a pupil's interest and that is that the teacher before beginning to talk should make sure that the scholar has something in his mind to attend with. Once started, the subject must be made to suggest new aspects of itself and to prompt new questions.”

UNITY OF IMPRESSION

THERE is another important phase of unity, which is the unity of impression. In this connection Francisque Sarcey has made a notable observation in the already quoted collection of his papers. He points out that, while it is easy to swerve an audience suddenly from the peak of laughter to that of tears or vice versa, it is inadvisable because it interrupts the prevailing tone and makes a return to it difficult.

² See also the quotation from Lessing on p. 56.

"It has often been remarked that laughter persists long after the causes have ceased," he says, "just as tears continue to flow after the arrival of the good news which should have dried them immediately. The human soul is not flexible enough to pass readily from one extreme of sensation to the contrary one. These sudden jolts overwhelm it with painful confusion." He continues that to be strong and durable an impression must be single, that comedy and tragedy should not be mixed in equal parts, but that one always should dominate the other throughout the piece. "If you force them to change abruptly from tears to laughter," he says then, referring to the audience, "and this last impression once becomes dominant, they will cling to it and a return to the mood they have abandoned will be almost impossible."

"BETTER" PLAYS

IT is easy to remark seeming exceptions to a truth about the drama if one wants to consider plays that are not as well made as they might be. Plays do not have to be perfect in order to succeed. They are not necessarily just good and bad, but good, better, and best; and poor, worse, and worst.³ Audiences are not very particular—not nearly so particular as they should be for their own good, because most dramatists are seeking a line of as little resistance as possible, and gladly take advantage of an audience's good nature. All that the usual audience demands is that a play shall have a majority of acceptable points, although at the same time, it is lavish in its appreciation of an over-plus.⁴

This disposes of a common belief that when a dramatist has "put over" a play, he has done all that is humanly possible. As a matter of fact most plays could be very much better; and a dramatist who boasts of a shoddy performance really is vaunting his ignorance of quality. Willard Mack recently

³ Horace points out by way of analogy in his "Art of Poetry" that a lawyer may earn his fee without being as skilled as Messala or as deep as Aulus, and also be in demand for his services.

⁴ Lessing in No. 80 of his "Hamburg Dramaturgie," already quoted, says: "The public will put up with it; this is well, and yet not well. One has no especial longing for the board at which one always has to put up with something."

wrote and produced a play in something less than a week; but it certainly was much inferior to the usual Belasco play that has simmered before that expert craftsman for about two years. Owen Davis once told me that he had written plays almost as rapidly as anybody—a melodrama in five days, to be precise—but for a really good job nine months would be a respectable period of devotion.

He is a poor playwright indeed who does not want to make his composition as dramatic as possible, to use every means at hand to make his work more compelling. A merely good play will not suffice; he must have a better play. And really, when he comes down to it, he will find that he must try to write a better play in order to have a merely good play, because of the many fortuitous circumstances in the theater itself that upset and defy calculation. "The best-laid plans of mice and men oft gang agley" in the theater a little oftener, it seems sometimes, than in the world of affairs. "I should be poor, cold, and shortsighted," wrote the distinguished Lessing in 1767 in a letter to his brother on going to the Hamburg Theater, "had I not in some degree learnt how modestly to borrow foreign treasures, how to warm myself at alien fires, and to strengthen my sight by the glasses of art."

When I say that a dramatist who is worth his salt will try to write a better play, I mean that he will endeavor to provide for his audience the full emotional experience that it seeks when it attends the theater.⁵ He will try to produce, by his careful manner of presenting his message and material, the reactions for which the spectators have paid. If he is not animated by the honest desire to give value received, he will try because satisfaction to one audience is likely to bring others and so increase his money profit. If he has a message, he will want to convey it as strikingly as possible; and if he has no message, he necessarily will want to stress the emotional value of his play because that will be all that will be left as an attraction to the public. No matter how he looks at it, it will

⁵ "The poet should endeavor to combine all poetic merits, or failing that, the greatest number."—Aristotle, "Poetics," XVIII, translation of S. H. Butcher.

be to his best interest to derive from his audience every possible ounce of consistent response.

"SECRETS" OF SUCCESS

MANY a successful dramatist who had no conscious theory of playmaking has been urged to state one just the same for the benefit of the struggling majority; and it has seemed highly humorous to him to utter a paradox sufficiently clever to be picked up by the press and bandied about in drawing-room conversations. There are some excellent examples of the professional man's usual attitude in a collection of letters written by eminent French dramatists of a past generation to Abraham Dreyfus, a literary gentleman who used them in a lecture on playmaking art at Brussels in 1884.⁶ Included in it is the statement of Emile Augier that his playmaking counsel must be much like the advice of the sergeant who told the conscript how to make a cannon, "You take a hole and you pour bronze around it"; Edouard Pailleron adds to his conviction that "before God and man" he knows nothing about it: "To talk too much about art is not a good sign in the artist. It is like a lover's talking too much about love; if I were a woman I should have my doubts"; Eugène Labiche says that his procedure is as follows: "When I have no idea, I gnaw my nails and invoke the aid of Providence. When I have an idea, I still invoke the aid of Providence,—but with less fervor, because I think I can get along without it." All of which doubtless improves tea-table conversation but aggravates the grave injury done the theater by the popular notion that the whole equipment necessary for success in it is the mere inclination.

Other dramatists, realizing the earnestness back of the request for information, drop the bantering tone and try to be as helpful as they can. Thus, Frank Craven, then author of "Too Many Cooks" and later to become author of "The

⁶ "How to Write a Play," letters from Augier, Banville, Dennery, Dumas, Gondinet, Labiche, Legouvé, Pailleron, Sardou, and Zola; translated by Dudley Miles, with an introduction by William Gillette, Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, New York, 1916.

First Year," told Della McLeod, for an interview in *The New York Press* of March 15, 1914, that about all the conscious theory he had was, "Get 'em in hot water and get 'em out again"—a pretty good recipe at that. It is also far more pungent than the explanation of St. John Hankin, which it suggests. Hankin said, in the third volume of his "Collected Works": I select an episode in the life of my characters or a group of characters, when something of importance to their future has to be decided, and I ring up my curtain. Having shown how it was decided and why it was so decided, I ring it down again."

In the course of centuries there has been piled up in countless plays a mass of material selected for its dramatic value. Here may be found all possible devices for stirring emotion in theater audiences. It is reasonable to state this with certainty because it is unnecessary to review all plays in future as well as in past in order to arrive at truthful generalizations about them. Close resemblance of a number of representative dramas will point almost infallibly to some truth concerning all others of the same kind. "In almost all arts and even sciences," say George Saintsbury in his "A History of Criticism," "but in Art even more than in Science, the task set before the human faculties is a gigantic 'Rule of False,' as the older arithmetic books called it, in which, by following out certain hypotheses, and ascertaining how and to what extent you are led wrong by them, you at last discover the right way. The most grotesque error is thus a benefit to Humanity, which, indeed, sometimes shows itself conscious enough of the beneficial character to perform the experiment over and over again."

I speak at length of this logical process because it is the manner in which you must prove to your own satisfaction the truths herewith. It is not the process of Francis Bacon, who recommended merely that in order to arrive at scientific truth we should collate *all* that had been said upon the point in bygone times; it is the later method of Galileo, which has become the accepted scientific procedure of to-day. In the seventeenth century, when he was formulating the laws of falling bodies, he sought the truth not only in books but in

experimentation with nature. Discerning from repetitions of movement in different forms what he believed to be a prevailing law of motion, he accepted it tentatively in order to test its truth with new examples. He tells us in his writings how he more than once was compelled to modify or to abandon a working hypothesis upon finding a contradiction, whereupon he would frame a new postulate, and proceed as before until he had found it so certain in its application that he could call it law.

By some such process of deduction, accepting seeming truths as laws until some one could disprove them, the men of the theater down the ages have evolved their theories of playmaking, how best to give the audience the emotional purgation it demands. Some of these theories are rich in truth; others are just highly ingenious, as for instance those involving the mythical unities of time and place; and many are palpably absurd, as the statement I once heard uttered before a large and attentive audience by an otherwise reputable professor. "The climax of every good play," said he, "must be in the mathematical middle."



CHAPTER VI

THE MATTER OF LENGTH

THE younger Dumas says in his contribution to Dreyfus that when he asked his distinguished father how to write a play, he was told, "It's very simple: the first act clear, the last act short and all the acts interesting." "The recipe is in reality very simple," comments the son. "The only thing that is needed in addition is to know how to carry it out. There the difficulty begins. The man to whom this recipe is given is somewhat like the cat that has found a nut. He turns it in every direction with his paw because he hears something moving in the shell—but he can't open it." This sums up the usefulness of most playwriting advice. It appears entirely true as applied to existing plays; but it is a most indifferent aid to composition of an original drama.

Take the celebrated statement of Aristotle that a play should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is true as an observation but of little practical value as a guide, although Aristotle earnestly tried to be more explicit. It is as felicitous in some respects as the direction given by the King to the White Rabbit in "Alice in Wonderland," "Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop." Take the analogy of the bar magnet. In a bar magnet you have a beginning, a middle, and an end; but break it in two, and each part will have a beginning, a middle, and an end; break these in two and even then each fragment will have the same sort of completeness, having its poles and "lines of magnetism." In the light of Aristotle's statement how long, would you say, a dramatic representation should be in order to be a play?

TIME LIMITS

FRANCISQUE SARCEY helps to clarify the matter a bit when he says in effect, in the aforesaid collection of his papers, that a play cannot last longer than six hours because that is about the limit of time that any crowd may be held together.¹ You will think here of Shaw's "Back to Methuselah," which, like the oriental plays, continues from day to day; but Sarcey clearly refers to the limit of continuous representation. Eugene O'Neill's "Strange Interlude" is no real exception, even if it is in nine acts, for in performance there is a full hour's intermission after the fifth act. Thomas Hardy's "The Dynasts," in nineteen acts, is avowedly not for stage presentation.

We know, then, the reasonable maximum length of a single representation. What is the minimum length? Here practice again provides a clue. Miniature plays were very popular in Italy and Germany years ago and a few have been written in modern America. The shortest I know—unless one counts that mentioned in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"²—was submitted in a contest in 1913 conducted by the Educational Dramatic League of New York City, and has been acted many times since with truly splendid effect. The entire play follows:

ACT ONE

AMERICAN SOLDIER (*To officers*). Say, do you know we ain't got no flag?

OFFICERS. Yes: ain't it fierce?

¹ Minturno (Antonio Sebastiano), Bishop of Ugento and a representative at the Council of Trent, observed in his "Arte Poetica" in 1563, that a play should occupy "not less than three hours nor more than four; lest neither too great brevity rob the work of its beauty and leave the desire of the hearers unsatisfied, nor excessive length deprive the poem of its proportion, spoil its charm, and render it boresome to the beholders. And indeed the wise poet should so measure the time with the matter to be presented that those who hear the work should rather deplore its brevity than regret having remained too long to listen." From translation of Ida Trent O'Neil in B. H. Clark's "European Theories of the Drama," Cincinnati, 1918.

² PHILOSTRATE: A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,
Which is as brief as I have known a play;
But by ten words, my lord, it is too long.

—Act V, Sc. I.

ACT TWO

OFFICERS (*To Col. Washington*). Say, do you know we ain't got no flag?

COL. WASHINGTON. Yes: ain't it fierce?

ACT THREE

WASHINGTON (*To Betsy Ross*). Say, do you know we ain't got no flag?

BETSY ROSS. Yes: ain't it fierce? Here, hold the baby while I go make one.

The whole point of this being that a play may not be longer than about six hours and that it may not be much shorter than a couple of minutes. Within these limits, however, it may be any length. Here again the audience is the determining factor. Of course, we want to give it just as much as it will take. An audience, judged by the question of physical capacity, is able to appreciate just so much lumped material. If a play is poor, an audience can stand little of it; if good, something more than three hours.

EXPLAINING ARISTOTLE

WHEN Aristotle said that a complete action is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end, he defined much more than magnitude. Many eminent critics and dramatists who have flourished since his day have been at pains to explain that. Voltaire, writing in the fourth decade of the eighteenth century, cited with full approval Corneille's interpretation, "unity of action consists of unity in intrigue and unity of peril"; and he said furthermore that the alleged invention of "unity of interest" by his contemporary, La Motte, was really identical with unity of action in its best sense. "Ask any one who has crowded too many events into his play," he said, "what the reason for this fault is: if he be honest, he will tell you that he lacked the inventive genius to fill his play with a single action. . . . It is certainly more difficult to

write well than to fill the play with murders, wheels, gibbets, sorcerers and ghosts."³

With respect to unity of action, Voltaire, who really seems to have known better than to have defended the two absurd, fancied "unities" of time and place, was eminently reasonable. "Why of one action only, and not of two or three?" he asked. "Because the human brain cannot focus its attention upon several objects at the same time; because the interest which is dispersed when there is more than one action, soon disappears; because we are shocked to observe two events in the same picture; because, finally, Nature herself has given us this precept, which ought to be like her, immutable."

In Dryden's "Essay of Dramatic Poesy," which is in the form of a conversation between Dryden and two fellow dramatists masked by fanciful names, the author has "Crites" (probably Sir Robert Howard) make the following explanation of the unity of action recommended by Aristotle: "As for the third unity, which is that of action, the ancients meant no other by it than what the logicians do by their *finis*, the end or scope of any action; that which is the first in intention and last in execution; now the poet is to aim at one great and complete action, to the carrying on of which all things in his play, even the very obstacles, are to be subservient; and the reason of this is as evident as any of the former. For two actions, equally labored and driven on by the writer, would destroy the unity of the poem, it would be no longer one play, but two: not but that there may be many actions in a play, as Ben Jonson has observed in his 'Discoveries;' but they must all be subservient to the great one, which our language happily expresses in the name of underplots."⁴ This doubtless was Dryden's own opinion, because in this particular discussion he gives the victory to Crites.

Goethe, as reported by Eckermann in the "Conversations with Goethe and Soret,"⁵ said that "comprehensibility" was the whole purpose of the rule, "and the three unities are only

³ "European Theories of the Drama" by Barrett H. Clark.

⁴ "Dryden's Essays on the Drama." Edited with an introduction and notes by William Strunk, Jr., New York, 1908.

⁵ Translation of John Oxenford, Bohn Library, Revised Edition, London, 1913.

so far good as they conduce to this end." Lessing seems to have said this less succinctly at an earlier date, while providing what seems to me to be a particularly satisfactory reconciliation of the unity of nature with the unity of a detached part of nature that we call a play: "In nature everything is connected, everything is interwoven, everything changes with everything, everything merges from one into another. But according to this endless variety it is only a play for an infinite spirit. In order that finite spirits may have their share of this enjoyment, they must have the power to set up arbitrary limits, they must have the power to eliminate and guide their attention at will. This power we exercise at all moments of our life; without this power there would be no life for us . . . The purpose of art is to save us from this abstraction in the realms of the beautiful, and to render the fixing of our attention easy to us." ⁶

THE POINT OF THE STORY

THIS makes clear what I meant when I said that a successful dramatist first determines the especial thing he wants to say, and then selects only those portions of his material that help him to say it.⁷ The purpose of the play is what determines its completeness. It is one subject treated in all of its necessary ramifications. "By action is meant an event or occurrence arranged according to a controlling idea," says Freytag in his "Technique of the Drama," "and having its meaning made apparent by the characters." John Galsworthy, in his essay, "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama," states it this way: "The perfect dramatist rounds up his characters and facts within the ring-fence of a dominant idea which fulfils the craving of his spirit; having got them there, he suffers them to live their own lives." To define the purpose of your play is the first great step in expert playmaking.

So soon as the purpose is achieved, so soon as the point of the story has been reached, the play is over. "Since it is nec-

⁶ "Selected Prose Works of G. E. Lessing," translated by E. C. Beasley and Helen Zimmern, edited by Edward Bell, London, 1913. (Dramatic Notes from the "Hamburgische Dramaturgie," No. 70.)

⁷ See page 18.

essary that the action be complete, one also must not add anything further," said Corneille in 1660, "since when the effect has been attained, the listener desires nothing more and is bored by all the rest. So it is that the expressions of joy which two lovers show on being reunited after many obstacles, must be very short."⁸ Racine merely implied the truth ten years later than Corneille's expression when he said, "Personally, I always have believed that since tragedy was the imitation of a complete action—wherein several persons participate—that action is not complete until the audience knows in what situation the characters are finally left."⁹

This is always with the assumption that you want to make your play just as nearly perfect as you can. I say "as nearly perfect" because it is virtually impossible to make a play a perfect mechanism without destroying some of its living truth. What a dramatist does is to know the nature of a perfect—or reasonably perfect—play mechanism and make the material for drama fit its requirements so far as he can without injuring its verisimilitude. For instance, in a stage play it is highly desirable to have all characters meet and transact their business on a sort of neutral ground before the eyes of the audience; but there are times when the material will not admit this; and it is necessary to modify the structure accordingly. "No one ever perishes because of his form; he lives or dies according to the matter," says the younger Dumas. "Expression will always, in spite of one's desires, equal thought: it will be just and firm if the thought is great; feeble and bombastic if the thought is vulgar or common."¹⁰

⁸ "Premier discours. De l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique," by Pierre Corneille. Translation by Beatrice Stewart MacClintock, in Clark's "European Theories of the Drama."

⁹ Preface to "Britannicus," by Jean Racine. Translation by Barrett H. Clark in his "European Theories of the Drama."

¹⁰ Preface to "Un père prodigue," by Alexandre Dumas, fils. Translated by Barrett H. Clark, "The Drama," February, 1917.



CHAPTER VII

PURPOSE

W. T. PRICE used to say to me, over and over again, "That rule must be a servant, not a master." John Dryden, in his preface to "Troilus and Cressida," quotes René Rapin to the same effect:

If the rules be well considered we shall find them to be made only to reduce nature into method, to trace her step by step and not to suffer the least mark of her to escape us: 'tis only by these that probability in fiction is maintained, which is the soul of poetry. They are founded upon good sense and sound reason rather than on authority; for though Aristotle and Horace are produced, yet no man must argue that what they write is true because they wrote it; but 'tis evident by the ridiculous mistakes and gross absurdities which have been made by those poets who have taken their fancy only for their guide, that if this fancy be not regulated, it is a mere caprice and utterly incapable to produce a reasonable and judicious poem.

The failure to think things through is perhaps the outstanding trouble with the American theater. Thinking things through frequently means collapsing the sensational character of the original idea; but the dramatist should find ideas which will stand the test. There was a great deal of value in the arrangement of old plays that said, in the program, "Act One—The Temptation," "Act Two—The Fall," "Act Three—The Regeneration," for the arrangement kept the thought clear, and prevented the dramatist as well as his audience from becoming so much involved that he could not readily be followed.

EPISODIC PLAYS

It is *possible* to have plays in which there is no single purpose embracing all the parts. Each succeeding episode may have a subject of its own, related to those before it only because its leading characters are the same. In Fanny Hurst's admirable photoplay, "The Good Provider" (directed by Frank Borzage), we have a succession of episodes related one to another by the slenderest of threads, yet each intensely interesting. First we see the Jewish immigrant who has built up his little wagon business in America to the point where he is able to bring his wife and children to a home of their own—ramshackle and tumbledown, but so much better than the hovel they left in Russia that they overflow with thanksgiving. Then we see the trials of the family in the illness of their little girl. Then the dissatisfaction of the son when his father brings him a pair of girl's shoes that make him the butt of his playmates. Next comes a period of prosperity when the wagon has become a store with a glass front and the children are complaining because their father does not react to the advertising and display methods of the great, neighboring city. Following that we have the further discontent of the boy and girl, now grown to adult life, culminating in the father's agreement to go to New York to live, largely to save the daughter's admirer from making a forty-five minute trip into the suburbs, although it means his own inconvenience in returning each day to his business. After this we see the father's initiation into expensive metropolitan hotel life, and then a chapter of action developing the daughter's romance and the unhappiness of the father as his family conspires to make him over into a "gentleman." In another chapter we learn of the father's business difficulties; and when his son demands money to be set up in business and his daughter requires money for a dowry, he denounces them for a pack of wolves and reveals the awful truth that he is virtually a bankrupt. A little later the daughter heart-brokenly tells her lover the circumstances, while the good provider prepares to commit suicide with an overdose of sleeping tablets; and, when the lover announces that he will gladly come to the

father's rescue financially, the mother saves the poor old man from the sleeping tablets just in time. All that remains to be said is that the family circle, augmented by the daughter's new husband, goes back to its suburban home, a wiser and happier group.

FOCUSED CONSTRUCTION

EACH of these episodes is splendidly worked out; but, despite the undeniable cumulative effectiveness of the slow-developing story, the dramatic action has to begin over again with each new section. The persistence of awakened emotion on the part of the audience does carry across the interval, but not so powerfully as it would have done had there been greater structural focusing on a central issue. This play is of the type known as "narrative," but it is far and away one of the best of that kind that I ever have seen. It will do much in its success to confirm the casual, loose-jointed method of play-building. The real retort to which is that plays are good, better, and best; and, while this is so splendid a play that I could hold it up in many respects as a standard of quality, I must in truth declare that in certain other respects it might have been better. What should be sought, by all the good sense of playwriting, is not a prolonged story but an *evolved* story.

Horace, writing his metrical "Epistle to the Pisos" close to the time of Christ, observed that Homer sometimes nods and that a spectator should not be too exacting so long as a play has a substantial majority of good points:

If then a poem charm me in the main,
Slight faults I'll not too rigidly arraign,
Which frail humanity has here and there
Let fall from oversight or want of care.

He added, however, that a moderate worth is not enough in a play from the dramatist's point of view, and that a writer who repeats his lapses after he has been warned of them, has no real excuse.¹

¹ Horace's "Art of Poetry," translated by Howes.

James A. Herne, the author of "Shore Acres," was a devout believer that a well-made episode is the microcosm of a well-made play; and according to the traditions of the stage, he would have proved it with his drama, "Griffith Davenport," had that interesting production not been presented at a theater where the prevailing form of entertainment had been musical farce and which had acquired some passing notoriety as a home for failures. Nevertheless, one cannot make a structurally complete play just by stringing together structurally complete episodes. The episodes in a well-made play must be subordinated to the broad design.

I may cite the analogy of the paragraph. The paragraph in the printed story corresponds in its relation to the whole story with the episode in its relation to the whole play. It has a purpose which is expressed in its key sentence, all other sentences in the paragraph being amplifications—modifying clauses, so to speak—of that dominating idea. But the key sentences of the successive paragraphs are really, in a larger way, simply modifying clauses of the central statement of the whole article. Without the central statement it is virtually impossible to determine the relative importance of each key sentence, just as it is impossible to have effective proportion of values in episodes without knowing the specific purpose of the whole play. Of course, when you write a paragraph you don't think of all this; the "trick" just comes naturally to you now—as the "trick" of writing episodes will come after a little practice.

UPLIFT

EVERY play should have a purpose beyond mere entertainment. Mark you, however, that I do not say "must." All plays should not be problem plays any more than all dramas should be tragedies; yet each should convey to its audiences a specific central impression. This, of course, is accomplished by "The Good Provider"; my carping at this play does not find an absence of central impression but just a slight clumsiness in achieving it—a matter of detail.

A play that conveys something more than mere entertain-

ment is not the only kind of play possible; but it is a better work—it must increase its audiences and endure longer. This is an ancient discovery in the theater. Horace says:

But he who precept with amusement blends,
And charms the fancy while the heart he mends,
Wins every suffrage. Rarely shall he miss
To enrich the *Sosii* with a piece like this;
Seas shall it traverse, and the writer's page
Hand down his glories to a distant age.

In Corneille's "Premier Discours" he stated that "the sole end of the drama is to please the audience," but he was careful to explain: "I did not mean to enforce this maxim arbitrarily upon those who strive to ennoble dramatic art by considering it as a means to supply moral purpose as well as pleasure. A dispute on this question would be useless because it is impossible to please according to the rules without at the same time supplying a moral purpose." Beaumarchais, author of "The Barber of Seville" and of "The Marriage of Figaro," who certainly knew what unalloyed amusement might be, declared in his "Essai sur le genre dramatique sérieux" in 1767: "If the gayety of the play has succeeded in sweeping me along for a moment, it is not long, however, before I experience a sense of humiliation at having allowed myself to be ensnared by witty lines and stage tricks; and I leave the theater displeased with the author and with myself. The essential morality of the comic play is therefore either very shallow, or else nothing at all; or finally it produced just the result which it should not produce. Not so with a drama which appeals to our emotions, whose subject-matter is taken from our daily life."²

Having a purpose in a play means here only that a play should be constructive in its impression, not that the drama should be a problem play. As Boucicault says, "Art is not a church; it is a philosophy of pleasure."³ "To act with a

² Translation by Barrett H. Clark in his "European Theories of the Drama."

³ "The Art of Dramatic Composition," by Dion Boucicault. Being part of an essay which Mr. Boucicault engaged to write but left incomplete. *The North American Review*, February, 1878. Charles Reade declared that Boucicault knew more about the grammar of the stage than all the other dramatists put together.

purpose is what raises man above the brutes," remarks Lessing in his "Hamburg Dramaturgy" (No. 34); "to invent with a purpose, to imitate with a purpose, is what distinguishes genius from the petty artists who only invent to invent, imitate to imitate." The importance of constructiveness is very clear from the most casual consideration of sympathy. Audiences unfailingly condemn plays that have nothing constructive about them.⁴ If all the characters are rascals, then the action must prove that some are more virtuous than others. This is the method of "Cheating Cheaters," a Broadway success which was hailed by some as another revolution in dramatic art. It did not involve a new principle at all: it merely played very close to the borderline of human sympathy.

Even the sensational sex plays that we decry do not depend on sensation alone but are careful to arouse a comparative sympathy for their characters. I do not mean that a play should not deal with vice; but I believe that the implied repudiation of vice at the close of a play is a very helpful step in sustaining the sympathetic interest of its audience. The fact that the plays that have lived down the ages are essentially uplifting plays is to me a conclusive and welcome proof of the great public's fundamental goodness of heart.⁵ For a more striking proof of the inherent goodness of audiences, notice that they refuse to be satisfied save by the just outcome of a contest, and that they persistently fix their sympathy on the oppressed side at issue.

When Frederic Van Rensselaer Dey, who wrote more than a thousand "Nick Carters" and was the first to develop that celebrated dime-novel hero, was working with me at the old Vitagraph Company on the synopsis of a detective photoplay,

⁴ Coleridge said of "Volpone the Fox" in his notes on Ben Jonson, that it is "impossible to keep up any pleasurable interest in a tale in which there is no goodness of heart in any of the prominent characters. After the third act this play becomes not a dead but a painful weight on the feelings."—"Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare and Some Other Old Poets and Dramatists," by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. "Everyman's Library," New York, 1907.

⁵ Arbuthnot says of his "Scriblerus Papers" that they were forgotten because "no man would be the wiser, better or merrier for remembering them." Victor Hugo said in "Les Miserables" (Book "Cosette"), "No path for thought is opened by a philosophy which makes everything end in No. To No there is only one answer—Yes."

"The Flaming Clue," he would not permit the detective to misrepresent his purpose even to accomplish a just end. He told me that in all the Nick Carter stories he ever had composed, Nick always kept his word after he had given it. In his opinion it was one of the strongest qualities that held public affection for that sleuth. Nick was a great man whose sterling character was dependable. The more one thinks of the instinct for good in the crowd, however mistaken its action may be to produce it (as in lynching and tarring-and-feathering), the more one understands the developed convention of melodrama, that virtue must be rewarded and vice punished. God grant that that instinct may continue and thrive!

GROWTH OF SPECTATOR'S KNOWLEDGE

I AM sure that I may record as "duly seconded and carried by unanimous vote of all the gentlemen present," the resolution that a play, or newspaper, or book subject should be single and complete. This recommendation, however, is no more than applies to a painting, or a statue, or a fine new skyscraper. It remains to be seen just how and wherein the complete action of a play differs from complete representation in any other form of art.

On an earlier page ⁶ I remarked that dramatic representation is of an *action*, of fluid, flowing events. The spectators see something transpiring, something presenting constantly new phases of interest through a development of subject matter. We hear persons declare now and then that such-and-such a successful play has "broken the rules" by being absolutely devoid of action; but this is never true. Action is not confined to physical change; it may be purely a spiritual unfoldment. "'Tis a great mistake in us to believe the French present no part of the action on the stage," said Dryden in his "Essay of Dramatic Poesy"; "every alteration or crossing of a design, every new-sprung passion, and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the noblest, except we conceive nothing to be action till the players come to

⁶ Page 44.

blows; as if the painting of the hero's mind were not more properly the poet's work than the strength of his body."⁷ Maurice Maeterlinck has written a number of remarkable passages in his "Treasure of the Humble" to explain this, especially in his essay entitled, "The Tragical in Daily Life." Here is one:

Are there not elements of deeper gravity and stability in happiness, in a single moment of repose, than in the whirlwind of passion? . . . To the tragic author, as to the mediocre painter who still lingers over historical pictures, it is only the violence of the anecdote that appeals; and in his representation thereof does the entire interest of his work consist. And he imagines, forsooth, that we shall delight in witnessing the very same acts that brought joy to the hearts of the barbarians, with whom murder, outrage and treachery were matters of daily occurrence. Whereas it is far away from bloodshed, battle-cry and sword-thrust that the lives of most of us flow on; and men's tears are silent to-day, and invisible, and almost spiritual. Indeed, when I go to the theater, I feel as though I were spending a few hours with my ancestors, who conceived life as something that was primitive, arid, and brutal; but this conception of theirs scarcely even lingers in my memory, and surely it is not one that I can share. I am shown a deceived husband killing his wife, a woman poisoning her lover, a son avenging his father, a father slaughtering his children, children putting their father to death, murdered kings, ravished virgins, imprisoned citizens—in a word, all the sublimity of tradition, but alas, how superficial and material!⁸

Action, once again, is merely a steady development of subject matter which gives the audience fresh considerations to engage their attention and interest. The limitations are limitations of intelligible terms of expression. Recall the words of William James, "The *conditio sine qua non* of sustained

⁷ In this connection read the admirable chapter entitled "The Hidden Meaning," in Arthur Ruhl's "Second Nights" (New York, 1914). This splendid book, ordinarily classed with collected essays by newspaper dramatic editors, has received only passing notice. As a matter of fact it is one of the most stimulating works of its kind.

⁸ It is the aim of the so-called "Expressionists" in the modern theater to uncover what Eugene O'Neill calls "the behind-life," the more profound meaning back of the literal presentation of fact. See Clark, "A Study of the Modern Drama," p. 470 f. See also Chapter XXXVII of the present work.

attention to a given topic of thought is that we should roll it over and over incessantly and consider different aspects and relations of it in turn."

"The emotion we commonly call *interest* is the pleasure we feel while contemplating the gradual production of a complete and symmetrical form," said Boucicault in the essay already quoted. "If we contemplate a shapeless mass of marble we take no interest in the block; but let a sculptor produce from it a beautiful figure, commencing with the head and bust; when we see the beginning of the production of a complete and symmetrical form, we have a feeling of expectation. As he gradually develops the body, our desire to see the rest increases; but the feeling is not satisfied until we can regard the entire figure, disengaged from the mass and complete."

SCRAMBLED CHRONOLOGY

WHICH raises an important point. The sculptor need not necessarily start with the head and bust; he may disclose any part of the form first, a hand or a foot, and develop the rest from that probably without loss of interest. In the same way, so long as the development of fresh aspects of the subject takes place in a play, the actual chronology of events does not matter. The audience may be given the latest happening first and the first happening last; it makes no great difference in interest, because the story advances with the accretion of fresh information. An interesting and curious case is Eugene Walter's "Paid in Full," in which, before the close of Act II, Emma makes an appointment with Captain Williams by telephone from her home, and then, after the curtain has descended and has risen again on Act III, showing the Captain's apartment, the Captain's telephone rings and the same appointment is made all over again. In other words, the acts overlap. Time is turned back—and yet the play movement is steadily forward, for the audience learns something new all the time.

The progress of a story is purely a development of knowledge about the subject. If we hear about the first happening

last, the development created by that information really *is* last. So you see, the great pother made about "On Trial" as a new kind of play, being told backward, was all mistaken. The earlier happenings of the story were all presented after the late murder by the witnesses in the court-room; but the audience, by gaining this fresh information, really was progressing toward a larger, fuller conception. There was a steady, forward growth. Those who believed that "On Trial" was reversal of the usual theater development of interest, quite obviously were not thinking of it with the mind of the audience where all dramatic effectiveness lies. Remember this point. It is going to be of the utmost value to you when you come to the exposition of events in your play prior to "the rise of the curtain."



PART THREE
THE PLAY IDEA
CHAPTER VIII

THE STRUGGLE OF WILLS

ARISTOTLE divides the action of a play into two parts —Complication and Unraveling or Dénouement. That is, tying the knot of circumstances and then unraveling it, getting into trouble and getting out of it. "Incidents extraneous to the action are frequently combined with a portion of the action proper, to form the complication," he says; "the rest is the unraveling. By the complication I mean all that extends from the beginning of the action and the part which marks the turning-point to good or bad fortune. The unraveling is that which extends from the beginning of the change to the end." Let us consider this.

THE FIVE PARTS

ARISTOTLE speaks of a turning-point, which plainly is that place in the action just after the knot of circumstances has been tied, and just before the unraveling begins. It is obvious that this is what later generations call Climax. Also, the fact that it comes between the complication and the unraveling seems to explain what was in the mind of my professorial friend when he declared that "the climax of every good play is in the mathematical middle." Aristotle furthermore seems to divide his complication into two parts by referring to "incidents extraneous to the action" which "are

frequently combined with a portion of the action proper." Incidents extraneous to the action clearly are those antecedent events which must be worked into the play in what we call Exposition. The remaining portion of the complication has been termed Introduction. Aristotle himself furnishes the term *Catastrophe* for the close of the play, which is intelligible when we recall that he was analyzing tragedy as the alleged highest form of dramatic art. Here we have complete, then, the five great divisions of a play which in substance have been accepted from Aristotle's day until our own—exposition, introduction or complication, climax, *dénouement* and *catastrophe*.

Apparently Aristotle formulated his theory mainly by observing the practice of the more successful dramatists of his day.¹ He endeavored to explain the character of dramatic effect, but he did not explain—unless in some improbable fragment among the missing portions of his "Poetics"—how one might arrive by logic at his scheme of a play's structure. Why, for instance, should a play action involve tying a knot of circumstances at all? It is an exceedingly shrewd observation, but it is by no means self-explanatory. Perhaps Aristotle knew why, but we have no grounds for that assumption, and beside, certainly much more has been read into Aristotle than he ever intended to put there.

The little omissions of the great Stagirite seem unimportant now, but they created ambiguities that led to serious confusion in the generations that followed him. Some of the profoundest literary controversies of the ages are over what Aristotle meant by this or that. Consequently, over the five certain and implied divisions of a play action as set forth by him, there is a respectable library of discussion available to the modern reader.

The five divisions seem to have been accepted by the Romans of Horace's day as five acts, for Horace notes in his "Ars Poetica" that five acts is the approved length. Dryden, in 1668, in his "Essay of Dramatic Poesy," speaking

¹ It does not necessarily follow, however, as some writers seem to think, that Aristotle therefore did not discern the basic truths of playwriting. He had before him enough evidence to establish the correctness of his hypotheses.

through the character of "Crites," reverts to Aristotle's own words, and interprets them as follows:

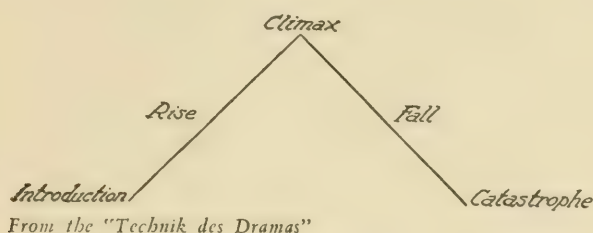
Aristotle indeed divides the integral parts of a play into four: first, the Protasis, or entrance, which gives light only to the characters of the persons, and proceeds very little into any part of the action; secondly, the Epitasis, or working up of the plot; where the play grows warmer, the design or action of it is drawing on, and you see something promising that it will come to pass; thirdly, the Catastasis, called by the Romans, *status*, the height and full growth of the play; we may call it properly the counterturn, which destroys that expectation, embroils the action in new difficulties, and leaves you far distant from that hope in which it found you; as you may have observed in a violent stream resisted by a narrow passage; it runs round to an eddy, and carries back the waters with more swiftness than it brought them on; lastly, the Catastrophe, which the Grecians called *λύσις*, the French *le dénouement*, and we the discovery, or unraveling, of the plot: there you see all things settling again upon their first foundations; and, the obstacles which hindered the design or action of the play once removed, it ends with that resemblance of truth and nature, that the audience are satisfied with the conduct of it.

But here again the prime consideration is overlooked, although Dryden, through another character, "Lisidecius," almost stumbled on the truth in defining a play as, "a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humors and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind."

It was the custom in Spain in Lope de Vega's time to write three-act plays; and the great Lope himself placed on record in 1609 his opinion of how these three acts should be handled.² "In the first act set for the case," he advises, "in the second weave together the events, in such wise that until the middle of the third act one may hardly guess the outcome." In 1863, in Germany, the distinguished dramatist, Gustav Freytag, discards the notion of conformity of the acts with the parts of the action, but accepts in substance Aris-

² "The New Art of Writing Plays," by Lope de Vega. Translated by William Brewster, with an introduction by Brander Matthews. Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, New York, 1914.

totle's plan of the five divisions.³ He sees the action of a play rising on one side of a triangle, the apex of which represents the climax⁴ (or "height" as Aristotle called it), and falling as abruptly on the other side to the catastrophe. This is the



FREYTAG'S PYRAMID

Gustav Freytag (1816-1895), eminent German playwright and novelist, author of "Soll und Haben," seems to have been the first to popularize the diagramming of a dramatic plot. This formulation has been very useful; but it has the great defect of suggesting that the dramatic intensity falls away in the latter part of the play. Brander Matthews has overcome this fault in another diagram, recommended in his "A Study of the Drama," a line ascending steadily to the very end.

diagrammatic representation of play structure that is known to-day as "Freytag's pyramid." It is a striking symbol capable of infinite variation to illustrate structural faults in plays, as has been demonstrated by Hennequin.⁵ But like virtually all the other theorists who preceded him, Freytag merely skirted the reason why tying a knot and untying it is the most successful play form.

LATER RESEARCHES

I AM giving you all this historical background for a very specific purpose. I want you to appreciate, presently, the master work of one of the greatest dramatic theorists who ever lived, who fixed all this wavering opinion in a formulation that must remain law so long as there are audiences and plays, a man whose name, according to Harrison Grey Fiske,

³ "The Technique of the Drama," by Gustav Freytag. Authorized translation by Elias J. MacEwan, Fourth Edition, Chicago, 1908.

⁴ The Greek word "climax" means "ladder."

⁵ "The Art of Playwriting," by Alfred Hennequin, Boston, 1890.

should be carved on the keystone of the arch of any temple erected in America to honor its drama.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the reason why tying a knot and untying it is the most successful play form, because earlier pages have explained how attention, curiosity, and sympathy are best induced by opposition of ideas, which, of course, implies a kind of struggle to which there must be, in the interest of completeness, an end. Had old theorists of the drama penetrated to this they would have uncovered true formulation, and would not have mistaken symptoms for the fact. It is surprising, in the light of what we know to-day, that some of their seeming blunders of statement are really half-truths. They just did not follow them through to the last analysis.

Aristotle notes that there is always a change of some kind, a progress from good fortune to bad, or from bad fortune to good. He speaks of tragic heroes pitted against circumstances or against other men; but his explanation of action quibbles with the truth by saying in effect that we should have action on the stage merely because the stage imitates life and action is a characteristic of life; which is not satisfactory in the least.

Opposition of ideas is pretty important, of course; and this truth has been seen quite clearly. Victor Hugo, in his preface to "Cromwell," states it with characteristic vigor: "On the day when Christianity said to man: 'Thou art two-fold, thou art made up of two beings, one perishable, the other immortal, one carnal, the other ethereal, one enslaved by appetites, cravings and passions, the other borne aloft on the wings of enthusiasm and reverie—in a word, the one always stooping toward the earth, its mother, the other always darting up toward heaven, its fatherland'—on that day the drama was created. Is it, in truth, anything other than that contrast of every day, that struggle of every moment, between two opposing principles which are ever face to face in life, and which dispute possession of man from the cradle to the tomb?" Aristotle refers repeatedly to the "issue" of a dramatic action. Freytag, in his "Technique of the Drama," does not phrase the idea of opposition so forcefully as Hugo;

but he emphasizes a corresponding thought: "The two ways in which the dramatic expresses itself are, of course, not fundamentally different. Even while a man is under stress, and laboring to turn his inmost soul toward the external, his surroundings exert a stimulating or repressing influence on his passionate emotions. And again, while what has been done exerts a reflex influence upon him, he does not remain merely receptive, but gains new impulses and transformations. Yet there is a difference in these closely connected processes. The first, the inward struggle of man toward a deed, has always the highest charm."

BRUNETIÈRE'S LAW

BUT that the most powerful plays are those which show man *exercising his will* in conflict with some opposition, is a developed thought. Freytag expressed it quite clearly in the pages I already have quoted; but for positive enunciation of the idea we must turn to Ferdinand Brunetière, who in 1893 declared his conviction that, "In drama or farce, what we ask of the theater is the spectacle of a *will* striving towards a goal, and conscious of the means which it employs." He formulates it as a law: "The general law of the theater is defined by the action of a will conscious of itself; and the dramatic species are distinguished by the nature of the obstacles encountered by this will. . . . And we will say in conclusion that one drama is superior to another drama according as the quantity of will exerted is greater or less, as the share of chance is less, and that of necessity greater."⁶

Irrespective of the narrowness or the universality of this principle as applied to existing plays, it certainly establishes the truth that audiences are interested more in characters who *act* than in those that are *acted upon*. The persons esteemed in this world are those who achieve in the face of odds: the rail-splitter who became President; the steerage immigrant who became the great steel-master; the poor mechanic whose genius in automobile-making "placed the world on wheels."

⁶"The Law of the Drama," by Ferdinand Brunetière, with an introduction by Henry Arthur Jones, Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, New York, 1914.

In brief, the "rag-to-riches" idea is a formula that is enthusiastically admired by people at large. It is only a little less potent when instead of seeing men succeed we see them fail after having made a valiant fight. That Captain Lawrence, whom we remember for his words "Don't give up the ship," actually lost his ship; the defenders of Bunker Hill ultimately lost the hill; Colonel George Washington at Great Meadows was compelled to surrender "Fort Necessity"—but you know as well as I do that popular imagination esteems them anyway; and even the gravest historians, knowing the facts, give their approval.

With this point defined I believe I have grouped for your consideration the broad essentials of a good play. To summarize: the play should be represented visually,⁷ should command attention, arouse interest, and evoke sympathy; it should be a complete subject in itself, with all parts belonging; it should concentrate its action on, or have the action develop from, the fortunes of one character primarily; its story should show that character involved in opposing circumstances exercising his will to be rid of them, carrying the play to the outcome of this struggle, either favorable or unfavorable to the character, but always constructive in its end.

With this same general ground in retrospect, plus a wide experience with cases of plagiarism, Moses L. Malevinsky, one of the best-known theatrical lawyers in America, felt that there must be some way to determine accurately just what constitutes a play. To have such a definition in court, where none existed before, would be exceedingly valuable. It would be valuable, moreover, to dramatists themselves, for they were not agreed on the nature of drama. Accordingly,

⁷ There is here the old controversy as to whether or not a play ever may be fully effective outside of performance, i. e., as a "closet drama," on printed pages for enjoyment exclusively in the library. There is no doubt that many times the reader of closet dramas has more pleasure in perusal than he would have had as a spectator in the theater; but this depends upon many special circumstances—chiefly the imaginative capabilities of the reader, his personal philosophy of life, the intention of the dramatist and limitations of the existing stage. Allowing for these matters, however, there is also no doubt that a work that observes the basic requirements of the art form, also is at its best when it may profit from equal circumstances of production. As to the danger of extreme positions for and against closet drama, see Flickinger, "Greek Theatre and Its Drama," preface, p. xiii ff.

Mr. Malevinsky carefully examined many plays and, generalizing about their contents, finally reached conclusions that he has put into a unique book, "The Science of Playwriting" (New York, 1925). The book must be read for itself; but just to indicate its nature more clearly, mention may be made of the author's "algebraic formula" that summarizes his view of what the composition that is called a play contains.

Let X equal a play, he says in effect. X , in turn, equals the sum of various factors that we may denominate A , B , C and so forth. The first factor he names is "a basic emotion or an element of a basic emotion." B is personification by character. C is motivation, which may be exerted through five forms: crucible, conflict, complication and (or) intrigue, crisis, and climax. D is the state of being forwarded by narrative, plot, or story, the same being compartmented by (E) derivative situations, and (F) dressed up by incidental, detailed construction. G is the orientation of the underlying idea through its constituent parts. H is the expression of the play in words, and I , which concludes the list, is "imagined with artistry."

The body of the book is, of course, devoted to closer consideration of these various factors. It is the author's contention that, "under the algebraic formula two or more plays may be paralleled, squared and plumbed with the certainty of an engineer's T, so that the understanding mind may be able to say with absolute assurance that two or more plays *are or are not* the same."



CHAPTER IX

THE ESSENTIALS

WHEN a dramatist, or any other craftsman, has a job in hand, he does not concern himself about the theoretical relationship of his obligations, one to another. If he is building an automobile, he knows that he has to provide wheels and an engine and a structure upon which an operator and perhaps goods may be carried. He may reason out that the wheels and the engine, which makes them go around, are very definitely related; but he probably will not try to explain the relationship of the carrying structure to either engine or wheels. They just are specific needs in combination; and the machine, whatever it is—whether the theorists call it a “unity” or not—must meet them.

THE PRICE FORMULATION

THAT probably was much the attitude of William Thompson Price in 1892 when he wrote his first playwriting book, “The Technique of the Drama.”¹ He knew from wide reading and from direct connection with the theater as dramatist, dramatic critic, and expert playreader, what the essentials of a good play were; but he felt the need of some simple formulation that would enable the dramatist to group them in the groundwork of his play, so that he would not have to go back and tack on the missing elements like candles on a

¹ For the writing and publication of this book much is due Frank Allen, adapter of Henri Berger's remarkable play, “The Deluge,” and for many years American representative of the Society of Men of Letters of France. At that time Mr. Allen was literary adviser to the New York publisher who brought the book out.

Christmas tree. It was a large order requiring courage to fill.

"It would be simply great to have a touchstone of success in the theater so you could prove the value of everything in your play while you're writing it," a Broadway dramatist told me one day; "but there 'ain't no such animal." And, of course, there isn't. Mr. Price never thought there was. But he did believe that most play failures were preventable failures, and that the whole average of play quality in America could be greatly raised by a sane examination of method. So he bent his energies to the formulation of dramatic principle; and in 1901, when, in conjunction with H. A. du Suchet, author of "My Friend From India" and "The Man From Mexico," he founded the school of playwriting in New York that he conducted until his death in May, 1920,² he brought to the attention of his students a remarkable form.

This form, which was not given to the public until 1908 when his second playmaking book, "The Analysis of Play Construction and Dramatic Principle," came from the press, was what he called a "Proposition." In that work he said: "A dramatic proposition is the brief, logical statement or syllogism of that which has to be demonstrated by the com-

² This school—if we except Ben Jonson's practice of taking in apprentices—was the first school of playwriting in the world, the precursor of all those playmaking courses that now are to be found in most American institutions of learning. Among Mr. Price's students were Thomas Dixon, Jr., author of "The Clansman" upon which Griffith founded "The Birth of a Nation"; Benjamin Chapin, author of "Lincoln"; Preston Gibson; Olive T. Dargan; E. A. Wheatley; and many more who achieved successful stage production. The list of patrons of the school when it started and as continued, included the names of Henry Watterson, Horace B. Fry, Daniel Frohman, Paul M. Potter, Marc Klaw, Abraham Erlanger, A. M. Palmer, Ben Teal, William H. Crane, Joseph Brooks, Lawrence Reamer, and Edward Fales Coward. While conducting the school, Mr. Price also did much expert play revision for prominent theatrical managers who sent their dramatists to his office for consultation. David Belasco, Marc Klaw, Harrison Grey Fiske, and Joseph Brooks were prominent persons who showed this confidence in him. Francis Wilson took his course of playwriting when on the road starring in his own play "The Bachelor's Baby," and conferred with him on all subsequent playwriting ventures. Charles Klein, Thomas Broadhurst, Laurence Eyre, and Austin Strong are other names that occur to me as those of writers who profited by the critical knowledge of this remarkable man. He died in New York; and when his body was finally interred in his native state at Frankfort, Ky., close to the grave of Daniel Boone, another great adventurer into parts unknown, the esteem of many prominent living men and women of the theater was reiterated. It was then that Harrison Grey Fiske uttered the eulogy I have quoted.

plete action of the play. Its simplest and perhaps its universal form so far as I have been able to discover, is a statement in three clauses: first, the Conditions of the Action; second, the Cause of the Action; third, the Result of the Action." The author explained his proposition by applying it to a familiar play, Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet":

CONDITIONS OF THE ACTION: Romeo and Juliet, members of the houses of Montague and Capulet, in deadly strife, fall in love.

CAUSE OF THE ACTION: They marry.

RESULT OF THE ACTION: Will their marriage result happily and reunite the families?

He continued by stating that the first clause constitutes "the premises, that is to say, the conditions and active facts upon which the action is based." In other words, the circumstances out of which the action grows. Concerning the Cause of the Action, he says: "Misapprehension and confusion commonly exist in the minds of the inexperienced as to the significance of this term. They are apt to imagine that the Cause of the Action is that Romeo and Juliet fall in love. Not at all. That is the beginning of the action and belongs to the conditions of it. . . . It is because Romeo and Juliet marry, with the swift following consequences, that we have action." The last clause is the main problem to be worked out, he states in substance. That is why he presents it in the form of a question. "Observe that the last clause contains two problems, a main and a subordinate one," he goes on. "This is usually if not always the case. The two wheels seem required to balance the vehicle. The action is not worked out until both are demonstrated. And the completion of both must be practically simultaneous."

In 1910, when I first went to school to W. T. Price, he had written most of a third book of playmaking called "The Philosophy of Dramatic Principle and Method," and was supplying it in mimeographed form to his students.³ This work

³ Subsequently this book was privately printed in pamphlet form. In January, 1912, and running throughout that year and the following year as well, it was published in Mr. Price's little monthly magazine, *The American Playwright*, files of which may be found in the larger libraries. A very few bound sets of the printed pamphlets were sold outside the school.

confirmed what the author had said previously about proposition, declaring that proposition states first and foremost what a play is about.⁴ "A proposition is a statement in terms of truth to be demonstrated. You have it in its counterpart in any proposition in Euclid. Q.E.D. It may be thrown into the form of a syllogism. In every case in court the lawyer is restricted to the pleadings. A man owns a horse; another steals it; his punishment is demanded. In a civil suit it is exactly the same thing. There is a matter at issue. The first clause contains the conditions, the second the cause of the action. It is obvious that the cause of the action in the above example is the stealing of the horse by the man. Destroy either of these two terms in the proposition and the case is settled, the proposition after that—the legal proposition as a whole—having no value. . . . The proposition is the least common denominator of the action."

THE ALL-PERVADING PROPOSITION

"PROPOSITION is the touchstone of structure," he says later in the same work. . . . "It is the only way to obtain Unity." And here he makes a tremendously important point. He says that the proposition must be about one main thing. He cites again the proposition of "Romeo and Juliet," saying, "Here we see two things involved at once, the lovers and their families—the main thing being their love, the families being subordinate. . . . One main proposition is the essence of unity; it is unity; and unity can be procured in no other way. It is impossible that two main ideas exist in the same play. The house will be divided against itself. Two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. The play itself, that which is developed from the one idea, is about many things; but the discerning eye of the author should penetrate to the heart of things. True dramatic instinct (which is the product largely of training) usually does this with unerring promptness, for that one idea is naturally the largest idea."

⁴ "If you do not know what you are writing about," he said in this connection in this same book, "you may be sure that no one else will."

He sums up the value of proposition in these words: "A proposition involves the whole play. It must have a certain magnitude and the action of the play must be commensurate with it. It suggests action, for the last clause requires that a problem be worked out. Doubt is expressed. The facts are given. Opposition is encountered—let it be in an affair of love, as in 'Romeo and Juliet,' and the question is, will the marriage be happy? Then, as the action develops, will he or she do this or that? Each turn giving new effort or hope to the characters, so that we are constantly saying, Will he? Will she? But it is all directed toward the solution of the one main thing at issue. We look to the result of the complete action. The proposition, then, must include all in a play from beginning to the end. It does not and cannot express all the details; but those details are evolved from it. Question the proposition, and the means of solution and the subordinate and logical action will be found."

But I want you to check its truth for yourself by what has been established in these pages as the necessary content of a good play. In this light we see that Price's proposition provides at one and the same time opposition of ideas and the tying of a knot of circumstances the unraveling of which is expressed in the form of a question presenting alternatives; it insures singleness and completeness of subject; it reduces the opposition to its lowest possible form of two contending sides; it provides for telling the story in terms of but one of these sides and so enables the dramatist to concentrate on a single leading character; and it creates an untenable state of affairs for the characters from which they may escape only by the exercise of will. These are the broad advantages of Price's proposition.

In being able to establish all these necessary elements in the very first stage of playmaking, a dramatist does not have to go back to it later to correct any fundamental mistake. So, when you once have settled on the proposition from your story material, you may rest assured that you have taken a full stride toward your goal.

THE LOST KEY

THE regrettable fact about William Thompson Price, who, in the opinion of those who knew him intimately, unquestionably was the greatest dramatic critic since Aristotle, who gave the last twenty, ripest years of his energetic life to the formulation of playmaking art, who saw others attain wealth and fame through what he taught them while he worked on uncomplainingly in humble circumstances, who championed Truth like her very incarnation, hating sham and evasion as the spirit of evil—the regrettable fact about this man, I say, was that he never completed his formulation on paper. I specify that he never wrote it down because I believe with all my heart that it was complete in his mind.

In his mental process, as it may be detected in his writings, he strongly suggests the celebrated mathematician and astronomer Pierre Laplace, who sought to offer a complete solution of the great mechanical problem presented by the solar system. In Laplace's "The Mechanism of the Heavens" the author was exceedingly diffuse; and it is said that he was at times compelled to devote hours to recovery of the chain of reasoning lost in the recurring formula, "It is easy to see—" Price had a similar habit of deferring an important consideration to "a later chapter" that sometimes relegated it unintentionally out of his books. This alone did more than anything else to deny him the honor that was his due during his long lifetime.

What makes this observation the more striking is that he frankly stated that his formulation stood in need of refinement. He urges his students and his readers to add what they can. I have before me a letter he wrote in November, 1910, urging it upon me. He says: "This very subject of proposition presents some difficulties that I want you to help me solve. I mean that if you try to reduce the older plays to proposition, as also many of the modern plays, you will see some apparent non-conformity to what I think is the law. Perhaps in every case this non-conformity is a defect. I have no doubt of it myself; but I would like to discuss every case of the kind. I would like you to note them. It may be that

some propositions require to be thrown into four equations, a form of syllogism that is permissible in logic, a form that is known to mathematics in what is commonly called proportion. Set your mind to work on those things."

I did set my mind to work on those things; but mainly because I could not articulate my questions at that formative period, I was unable to grasp the full force of his conception as it existed, much less to assist him to develop it. I knew, however, that I was close to something vast and important, for day after day during my association with him after the close of my own formal student period, I saw him revise plays with utmost sureness and ease by the application of his marvelous touchstone. I knew that it worked; yet, for my life, for a long time I could not make a proposition of my own that he would approve. Sometimes I came very near it; but he always found some flaw that prevented its operation. Yet, when he adjusted it for me, I saw its unfailing magic.

Recollection of this led me to labor over the problem for years. It was much like the hunt for the philosopher's stone after having caught a glimpse of it. I knew that it worked because I had seen it work; and I was determined to uncover its good sense. It may be that I did not realize the especial truths that had been asserted by great critics whose works I had read. For instance, guided by one or two admirable books by Brander Matthews, I had read Aristotle's "Poetics" before knowing Price at all. In all events, the truth had to dawn on me by slow degrees; and virtually all of it in actual practice. This background was vital because Price's great formulation was a culmination of the world's previous play-making theory.

AUSTIN STRONG TAKES A HAND

IN TRYING to solve the riddle, it didn't occur to me that there might be others among Price's students and friends who also had become imbued with the search. Human nature is not patient, as a rule; and only a few had glimpsed the magic of proposition, which was necessary before one could have the incentive to dig for it. So when I finally submitted this

G. H. Q.

Conditions of Action

A to B A to B we are presented with a question for the first time - we are called a "Little Question"

Cause of Action

A to B again We are asked Little Question for the second time and it is intensified into Big Question

Result of Action

Both these questions being answered will give the last act its value. There is after the entrance of X, the audience will regard the figure of the protagonist with the richness of knowledge acquired in the second journey from A to B

Act I,

A to B + Little Question

Act II

[A to B + Little Question] + (X i.e. again) A to B + Big Question + X

Act III

X being the audience's supreme knowledge - X then for waits to see Big and Little Question solved.

Adapted from my article
of Nov 1926
Nashua

Courtesy of the Author

WORKING FORMULA OF AUSTIN STRONG

For detailed explanation the reader is referred to the body of the text. Mr. Strong, author of "The Drums of Oude," "The Toymaker of Nuremberg," "Three Wise Fools," "Seventh Heaven" and the adaptation of Mme. Rostand's play, "The Good Little Devil," was a student and friend of William Thompson Price whose Proposition is interpreted and developed in this formula. "G. H. Q." is the name of Strong's play produced in the autumn of 1928.

book for publication, I fancied myself quite alone in carrying on. Then the time came to prepare illustrations. Letters to friends among the dramatists, some of whom I had not seen for years, brought me specimen workshop pages here reproduced. At almost the last moment one came from Austin Strong, author of "The Toymaker of Nuremburg," "Seventh Heaven," "Three Wise Fools," and many more.

"I fear my notes will look like madness to any one else," he wrote in his accompanying letter. "I have worked out a queer lot of symbols which help me in my work. I pray at the feet of the Goddess Unity—and that entails the study of Logic. After many failures and flounderings I found that to get dramatic success one had to think basically—had to learn how to think—I am still trying to learn."

But Austin Strong had chanced to send his unique page to one of the very few persons who not only recognize the meaning of his "queer lot of symbols," but who know what he was reaching for. My delighted note of acknowledgment brought speedy answer. "Your letter was a great surprise and pleasure to me," he said then. "You are the first who has shown any knowledge of Price. I can now be able to express my gratitude to that wise old man. I knew him through Francis Wilson and went and sat at his feet many a time. I agree with you that he was a 'giant in the theater' and still has so much to give the young dramatist. What little success I have had I owe to Price. I went through the same experience you went through—of glimpsing what he had in his mind and finding that he couldn't express it. I have tried to tell my fellow dramatists and young fellows about him, but they couldn't put themselves through the discipline of thought necessary." In conclusion he suggested that we get together. "Nothing would give me more pleasure," he said, "than to talk to some one who knows something of 'The Cause of Action'—that elusive Goddess!"

His page of notes (dated November, 1926) is reproduced herewith for the reader's own examination. In it Strong has interpreted proposition, for thinking purposes, in terms of a three-act play, each act devoted to a clause of the proposition. Realizing that the dramatic force was in the question pre-

sented by the "cause of the action," he viewed the "conditions of the action" as a question, too, differentiating them as "little question" and "big question." Thus he obtained drama from the outset. In the course of the first act the little question is developed—Romeo and Juliet fall in love and discover that the enmity of their families is an obstacle to consummation of that love. In Act Two the development of the little question is repeated; but this time it is intensified into big question—Romeo and Juliet continue their love affair despite their danger, and finally defy their families and make the situation irrevocable by marrying. Thus we arrive at the big question which is, will their marriage result happily and reunite the families, or—? The answering of the now-combined big and little questions constitutes the third and concluding act.

An especially interesting consideration is provided by an element that Strong calls "the audience's superior knowledge." This, according to his reasoning, has been acquired during the repetition in Act Two, of the little question of Act One. It is this superior knowledge, this developed omniscience that gives the audience its interest in the solution of the big question in the last act. There are no doubt many other implications here that I have not divined and that the reader will. But for the present, I have remarked enough to show that Strong succeeded in developing a very serviceable arrangement.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT

ABOUT 1912 I wrote a synopsis of "Hamlet" and made a surprising discovery. The whole action of the play was revealed as the "plot and counterplot" ⁵ of just two opposing elements—Prince Hamlet and his uncle, the King. I learned so much from that analysis that I know it must clarify the situation for you, too; so I shall repeat it here. The synopsis is arranged in two columns, representing respectively Hamlet and the King. If you read the matter back and forth across the page, you cannot fail to be struck with the manner in

⁵ This very old expression carries a definition of drama in itself. It gives us the idea of opposition, and also the idea of action motivated by will.

which Shakespeare has worked the action from start to finish as a conflict of wills. And yet some critics say that Hamlet is a character who never acts!

HAMLET

Hamlet hears the Ghost's accusation. Makes his vow to avenge his Father's death. Becomes changed.

But Hamlet, now having but one purpose in life, breaks with Ophelia.

In shaking off these two, Hamlet learns that his Uncle suspects him: and, the strolling players arriving, he conceives the idea of using them to test his Uncle.

Hamlet arranges a play paralleling the situation in which he believes his Father was murdered, and "agrees" that the court may witness the performance.

KING

King, feeling guilty, tries to account for change in Hamlet. Polonius suggests it may be just love of his daughter Ophelia, and to satisfy King of this, determines to investigate.

King, seeing it isn't Ophelia, arranges to sound Hamlet through Hamlet's intimate friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

King, finding Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot pump Hamlet, determines with Polonius to learn through Hamlet's Mother.

At the performance, the guilty King commits himself.

Hamlet, now satisfied of his Uncle's guilt, determines to kill him; but finding him praying, decides to wait for a more seasonable time.

Hamlet has the scene with his Mother in which the information sought by the King comes out; but the King's only witness, Polonius, is killed by Hamlet.

Hamlet agrees to go on account of the death of Polonius; but upon seeing the fine struggle of Fortinbras for the sake of a mere abstract principle, he determines to fight for his own greater purpose, and remains near the King.

Hamlet, confronted with his Uncle's perfidy through the attempt of Laertes, is so thoroughly convinced of the guilt of the King that he kills him before his own death from the wound by Laertes.

This gives the King time to plan to rid himself of Hamlet; but he is at loss how to do it because Hamlet is so loved by the people.

This affords the King an excuse for sending Hamlet away; and at the same time he arranges for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to betray him.

The King, finding his plan has failed, tells Laertes to avenge his Father, Polonius, and his Sister, Ophelia (who has gone mad for love of the melancholy prince who has jilted her, and committed suicide), by killing Hamlet.

Comment is scarcely necessary to call your attention to the fine interplay of this plot, or to the splendid playwriting lessons it conveys. It is a clear and concise guide to dramatic effectiveness in all the parts without once departing from the unity of the play idea. I must remark, incidentally, that it proves the structural value of Hamlet's scene with Fortinbras which most theatrical producers prefer to omit as unnecessary.⁶

Largely from this experience I concluded that although the element of conflict in plays is quite essential, the whole conflict should be kept down to the fewest possible parties, namely two. As a working hypothesis I assumed that in order to state the problem to be solved in a play—corresponding with the third clause of Price's proposition—both sides to the issue must be given; and as a conflict cannot exist with only one side stated, the issue must be complete so soon as the second side is fully presented. I argued, therefore, that we might call the first side of the problem the Conditions of the Action and the second side the Cause of the Action because so soon as that was given the problem was automatically stated, too. This view of the case gave me a proposition of "Hamlet" as follows:

CONDITIONS OF THE ACTION: Hamlet, hearing that his Uncle killed his Father, takes solemn oath to avenge his Father's death, but first requires material proof of his Uncle's guilt.

CAUSE OF THE ACTION: The Uncle commits himself in a situation contrived by Hamlet to trap him.

RESULT OF THE ACTION: Will Hamlet, having received proof of his Uncle's guilt, fulfil his vow to avenge his Father?

In many respects it was a very workable proposition, and guided me in much subsequent playwriting. But for all that it was not easy to contrive a proposition by that reasoning. Sometimes I had to return and remake the proposition long after I had worked my way into later stages of a drama's construction. Nevertheless, it was a far better instrument than

⁶ See in this connection "Play-Making," pp. 94f., where William Archer says that, "from the point of view of pure drama there is not the slightest necessity of this Fortinbras element."

I had previously known; and its value was becoming apparent to others. When I used it to make a film adaptation of an old standard novel for George Randolph Chester, the creator of "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," who at that time was scenario editor for the Vitagraph Company of America, he declared, after watching me closely every step of the way, that my playmaking logic was "the most unassailable" he had ever known, and supported me in that particular case to the last turn of the camera crank. Only the logic was not mine; it was Price's.

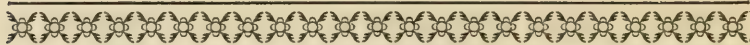
THE PRECIPITATING ACT

THE main trouble seemed to be in defining the Cause of the Action. I realized the force of Price's point that it was the act that made the issue inevitable; but I usually had great difficulty casting about to find it. Whenever I did find it, however, my structure gave me little further trouble. There was not much assistance in Freytag's description of "the exciting force" of a dramatic action, because by this he meant only that act of the "counter-play" which decides the hero to exert his will.⁷ Nor was there more in the reference to a "moving cause," which comes "as soon as the necessary exposition is finished," in a useful little book on literary forms that I had within reach of my table,⁸ because in its full definition this appeared to be identical with Freytag's "exciting force." Even Price's insistence that we should never speak of the middle clause as "Cause" but always as, "Cause of the Action,"⁹ did not awaken in me a glimmer of response. What he really meant by Cause of the Action did not come to me until, in trying to decide where best to begin a play, I conceived the two parties that were to come to grips in the action of the play as being in a condition of potential fight before the curtain arose, waiting only for a single aggressive move on either side to start the struggle. So it was that I came to the truth that the Cause of the Action is really a Precipitating Act—and so I have called it ever since.

⁷ "The Technique of the Drama."

⁸ "Manual of Composition and Rhetoric," by Gardiner, Kittredge, and Arnold, Boston, 1907.

⁹ The term "Cause of Action" is very common in legal procedure.



CHAPTER X

PROPOSITION: THE TOUCHSTONE

THERE is a strong tendency to think of the three clauses of Price's proposition as most theorists have thought of "beginning, middle, and end," assigning to each an equal part of the action. This is all wrong. The story of a good play is the story of the open struggle, not of the preparation for the scrap.¹ The play really does not naturally begin until after the precipitating act. Any drama that there may be before the precipitating act—and of course you must have some explanation beforehand of the circumstances out of which the fight is to grow—is purely that which you have artificially induced. Great plays usually have the appearance, at least, of beginning in *medias res*. The audience comes to see the struggle, not the training of the fighters; and the sooner the contestants get into it, the sooner the dramatist will evoke the sympathetic participation of the spectators, drawing them out of themselves into the fortunes of the play. In other words, Price's formulation is primarily a manner of stating succinctly: first, the circumstances out of which the action proper grows; second, the precipitating act which compels a fight to a finish; and finally, the objective of the play as a whole, expressed in alternatives—one in favor of one side at issue, the other in favor of the other.²

¹ No more is it of the settled state of affairs after the scrap. In studying conditions out of which the first drama grew, Miss J. E. Harrison observes that even in earliest times the dramatic expression was of things at issue—"The savage utters his will to live, his intense desire for food; but, it should be noted, it is his desire and will and longing, not certainty and satisfaction, that he utters."—"Ancient Art and Ritual," p. 56.

² It is no wonder that court-room trial scenes have been popular in the theater from the days of the ancient Greeks, fulfilling, as they do, most of the necessary conditions of dramatic action.

THE SUGGESTIVE SYLLOGISM

PROBABLY my greatest negligence was that I had failed to investigate the syllogisms used in logic. There was an extensive literature on this subject fully within reach. Moreover, Price had remarked to me more than once that it was strange that Aristotle, who is said to have invented the syllogism, did not apply it to drama.³ This should have been my clue. However that may be, one day after Price had gone (perhaps to meet Aristotle face to face), I had the notion of trying to re-create in my own mind the probable attitude of Price when he first made his formulation. I reviewed playmaking theory as I have done for you in these pages; I re-read Price's first book, "The Technique of the Drama," wherein are recorded, probably, the particular reactions of the author shortly before he made his first dramatic proposition, and I reconsidered the known facts of his early training.

My old teacher (he was about seventy-five when he died) had been a lawyer in the first decade of his adult life; and he had become familiar with the principles of logic. He had learned the formulation of a proposition for use in debate and the preparation of briefs. Hence, in trying to strip material for a play to its essentials, he sought to state his subject in that form. But a play is not a mere exposition of fact arising from a premise and advancing to a conclusion; it is at least two separate expositions of the same fact in conflict with each other. What seems to have been in the back of the old gentleman's mind when he finally answered the riddle, is the ancient Greek combination of two propositions known in the field of logic as the Dilemma, or double proposition. The classic example of a dilemma is that given by Aulus Gellius: "Women are either fair or ugly; if you marry a fair woman, she will attract other men; if an ugly woman, she will not please you; therefore marriage is absurd." Neither alternative of a dilemma is pleasant, whence we get the expression, "the horns of a dilemma."

³ Aristotle's "On Interpretation" deals with proposition; his "Former Analytics" is concerned with syllogism.

Whether this actually was the process of Price's thought or not I am unable to say. The fact is that he formulated a proposition statement of a dramatic action that worked marvelously, though for other persons to formulate one seemed well-nigh impossible because he had not given the key which was in his own mind. I may not have worked out his ideas by extension, as I hope I have; but certain it is that I now have a kind of proposition that works quite as successfully as his.

DILEMMA

★ CONCEIVING Dilemma to be the essential thought because there we have two opposing principles presenting alternatives, I proceeded to consider the two sides at issue in a play as separate propositions, running concurrently, each aiming at an end unacceptable to the other. To reach this end, each side had to cover two steps: first, the conditions out of which its particular action was to rise, and second, a clash with the opposition which stood in its way to desired achievement. This was the only logical way to establish circumstances and alternatives, both vital to dramatic action.

My next step was to combine the two single propositions. This involved deciding which side was to gain the sympathy of the audience because whichever side was the first aggressor would sacrifice sympathy, while a retaliatory act might gain it. The story normally belongs to the sympathetic side at issue not merely because of its better emotional power but because of its necessarily constructive aim. For purposes of concentrated attention the story must be primarily of one side or the other. The unsympathetic side would normally exist, then, only in so far as it motivated the acts of the sympathetic side. You think in contradiction of plays that feature villains, like "Richard III" and "The Green Goddess." However, never mind that just now. Just look at the double proposition used in writing "The Gateway to the West," an historical play dealing with the mastery of the Ohio by the English, 1753-1758:

ENGLISH

(Sympathetic side)

*(Now we have the just
resentment of the injured
party, and consequent sym-
pathy.)*

England needing the West for expansion of her Colonies, and having claimed the territory in the earliest colonial charters prior to La Salle, sends Washington with a note to the commander of the French forts on the Ohio, demanding his removal in order to preserve the existing peace of the two nations.

FRENCH

(Unsympathetic side)

France has shut the Thirteen English Colonies in on the seaboard by fortifying the Ohio line—as part of La Salle's claims to the Mississippi and its tributaries—to connect Canada with Louisiana.

*(The above is the original
aggression of the unsympa-
thetic side which is neces-
sary to awaken the resent-
ment of the sympathetic
side of the issue.)*

France refuses to give up the Ohio and sends Coulon de Jumonville to remove all trespassing English by force.

*(Notice that this further
aggression of the unsym-
pathetic side is necessary to
develop the circumstances
of issue, because, for the
unsympathetic side to with-*

draw its claims upon expression of the sympathetic side's resentment, would make conflict unnecessary and there would be no real play.)

(Now the precipitating act which makes a fight to a finish imperative.)

Washington kills Jumonville, thus starting the Seven Years War between England and France.

This presents the great question or problem of the play. Will the English be able to hold the Gateway to the West, or will the French become the masters of the Ohio?

The answer to this question is the end of the play, as it is the end of conflict. I have used for illustration an historical play because its material is taken, as the material for all good plays is taken, from real life—life that in this case may be checked by the reader.

This peculiar alternation of sympathetic and unsympathetic sides till the conflict between them is precipitated, is exactly the same as is to be found in great plays throughout the history of the drama. You have no true dramatic action till the audience begins "putting two and two together"—until the audience interprets probable outcome in the light of some other fact previously known. That is, there can be no issue unless materials for issue have been planted. See how much clearer the proposition of "Romeo and Juliet" becomes by this form of statement:

Two families are at deadly enmity.

Romeo and Juliet, son and daughter respectively of these two warring families, fall in love without being aware of each other's identity.

The enmity of the lovers' families is realized as a bar to their union when they discover each other's identity.

They defy the enmity by marrying.

Will their marriage result happily and reunite the families, or will the feud continue and make their happiness impossible?

This, you see, is not a substitute for Price's formulation, but is a development of his own ideas. He wrote me, if you remember, that, "It may be that same propositions require to be thrown into four equations, a form of syllogism that is permissible in logic, a form that is known to mathematics in what is commonly called proportion."

ONE SIDE OWNS THE STORY

As a little instance of how proposition checks the wrong tendencies of a working dramatist see how easily he might give equal elaboration to both sides of the issue if he did not know that it would divide and diffuse the interest. The audience is particularly interested in one side or the other; and it is interested in the opposing element only in so far as it produces a reaction on the sympathetic side. So we cut the unsympathetic side to the bone, to its absolute essentials, and correspondingly enlarge, develop, the sympathetic side whose fortunes the spectators have come to witness. That explains my frequent criticism, during the writing of "The Gateway to the West"—"Too much French." The story of "The Gateway to the West" belongs to the English, not the French; and so it is told with the English side in the foreground, specifically with Colonel George Washington as the central figure.

In writing a play for a star, the star will be the first to remind the writer that he has not given all possible scenes to her; and if she represents the sympathetic side of the issue, she will be perfectly right. If she portrays the unsympa-

thetic side, on the other hand, suppression of the characters that represent her opposition will work to the play's disadvantage. Plays of this sort are interesting but abnormal, and the dramatist writing one has to exhaust his bag of tricks to keep attention on the central figure. In "The Green Goddess" you will find that George Arliss, playing a suave villain as the central figure, works tirelessly to fascinate the audience when its attention normally would go to the sympathetic characters in the sinister man's power. In this play, as in all other intelligent productions of the same type—"Kismet," for example—you will find some of the big scenes of the action played by subordinate characters without the star.

If you can determine the point of your story, you will have made an excellent beginning to establish your proposition. When you have defined the specific sides at issue and selected that which is to dominate the story, you will have taken the first great step in formulation. The next move is to consider the principal side alone, establishing its resentment in some oppressive circumstances, and its definite embarkation on a finish fight against these circumstances. Then you can fill in the other side at issue. The first appearance of the oppressive circumstances may be regarded as the first act of the unsympathetic side. That is the original aggression providing the distressing state of affairs for the sympathetic side, and is what provokes sympathy for that side. "Pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune," says Aristotle. The second act of the unsympathetic side is an aggravation of its offense in response to the expressed resentment of the sympathetic side, and is what motivates the open rebellion of the sympathetic side that we call the precipitating act.

It is almost impossible at once to work out a specific major proposition—or a minor proposition either, for that matter—unless the plot material, which provides the necessary detailed movement of the story, is available. The first proposition necessarily must be tentative, a mere working hypothesis to be developed through application. Like all other stages in playmaking, it must be kept fluid as long as possible.

IN MEDIAS RES

THE first tendency necessarily must be to try to start the story too far back. Here you must bear in mind that the real play is the open conflict, and that all the preliminary circumstances are just "stalling" unless they are necessary to the intelligibility of the action proper. It frequently happens that many pages of deadwood may be lopped off merely by assuming that a given fact *has* happened instead of that it is just occurring now. The fact that the information is new to the audience makes it reasonably active.

If you obey the requirements of your proposition, which, as I said before, is a mere concise statement of the circumstances out of which action grows, you cannot fail to provide your play with its most effective proportions. Time and time again I have witnessed plays that did nothing but get ready for action; all they did was plant circumstances for action which never came. This condition may be why Margaret Anglin said one time that, "Good first acts are the curse of the American theater."

A proposition is much like the statement of a good anecdote; we must have the circumstances explained crisply but sufficiently for full appreciation of the point.⁴ It is merely a starting-point for the true enjoyment to be found in the theater. Hence the most direct, clear-cut statement of all prior to the precipitating act is vital. We cannot say, "Let's go," until we are "all set." On the other hand, to hold over explanatory matters until after the precipitating act is to interfere with the smooth flow of enjoyment.

Everything vital should be planted early in the play. "The first act should contain the basis for all the acts," says Cor-

⁴ ". . . of those things which are antecedent to the play, and are related to make the conduct of it more clear to us: but 'tis a fault to choose such subjects for the stage as will force us on that rock, because we see they are seldom listened to by the audience, and that is many times the ruin of the play; for, being once let pass without attention, the audience can never recover themselves to understand the plot: and indeed it is somewhat unreasonable that they should be put to so much trouble as that, to comprehend what passes in their sight, they must have recourse to what was done, perhaps, ten or twenty years ago." —Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" in "Dryden's Essays on the Drama," edited with introduction and notes by William Strunk, Jr., New York, 1908.

neille.⁵ No fresh elemental material should be injected in a play after the precipitating act. A proposition is the complete statement of the complete situation; and it is self-sufficient to bring about its own conclusion. This may be accepted as a vital working principle. The best dramatic issue may change its circumstances after the precipitating act, but never its nature. This explains why old dramatists recommended never to introduce an important character so late as the third act. Such introduction is, generally speaking, part of the "getting-set" period lugged in as an afterthought and hence disruptive to interest. The reasoning also explains why coincidence is fully accepted by the audience in the conditions out of which a play action grows, but seems forced and unnatural when it occurs after the precipitating act.

he *Cause of the Action or The Precipitating Act*
SIDELIGHTS ON PROPOSITION

CONDITIONS of the action are best when they are simple. When the opposition grows out of involved, intricate causes—secondary and tertiary—interest requires unusual concentration on the part of the audience. This has led to another "rule" that, "audiences never should be made to think." Of course that is absurd; but it has a glimmer of truth, which is that audiences never should be *conscious* of the effort of attention.

The clash in a dramatic issue is not of circumstances but of aims. Keep this constantly in mind. The dramatic value of a scene showing a man being thrown into prison is not in that fact but in the desire of authority on the one hand to keep him in, countered by his own desire to get out. This inevitably suggests the force of what has been said about an assertion of will.

You cannot consider any circumstance an act which forwards the story unless it involves a definite move to accomplish a purpose. It is not dramatic opposition to show:

1. An enemy ship approaching
2. A colony very weak,

which might be described as a phase of an historical play on "Jamestown;" the presentation really shows:

⁵ Corneille, "Premier Discours," in Clark's "European Theories of the Drama."

1. An enemy ship approaching

2. A colony very weak but *preparing to fight*,

which is vastly different, and vastly more effective. The movement for either side should not be a condition of, "Now I will"—"Now I won't," but a steady advance in achievement of purpose, step by step. In "Hamlet" the hero never doubts what he is to do when he has proved his uncle's guilt, and the King never doubts what *he* is going to do when he has proved Hamlet's knowledge of his guilt.

The cause of the action, or precipitating act, is preferably a single, simple act. If it is complicated it must be ponderous in its movement and hence disruptive to the onrush of interest. It is the spark which detonates the powder magazine. Prior to that there is only potential action. After it action should be inevitable. The quality of *necessity* in dramatic situations and incidents was remarked very specifically by Hamilton Wright Mabie in an essay on Joseph Addison.⁶ The clash must not only be inevitable; it also must be of the sort that must continue until one side or the other is the acknowledged victor. The villain must be thwarted permanently; the hero must be fixed in his success. Scribe certainly had the right idea when he saw to it that the winner of each of his dramatic conflicts received in addition to his or her dramatic triumph, a bag of gold. He confirmed their victory.

The precipitating act is in itself a step toward working out the issue. It is a gage of battle by being along the lines of no compromise. It does not *necessarily* make the issue dark for either side; it rather places the contestants on equal ground by making their chances even. With even chances, even if the equalizing element is merely a fighting spirit asserted by the oppressed side, the combat becomes alive with interest. The sort of scrap that sporting men like is the prize-ring bout that lasts an exceptional number of rounds and ends in a draw. The precipitating act is the turning of the worm, the balancing of the score. When there is no assurance that

⁶The critic is speaking of Addison's play "Cato": "The character of Cato is essentially an abstraction; there is little dramatic necessity in the situations and incidents."—"The Warner Library," University Edition, I, p. 158.

the unfortunate side will fight for its rights, interest lets down. In motion picture serials the problematical end of each episode has suspense only in proportion to the trapped man's reputation with the audience for pluck and resourcefulness.

the dramatic question
 The issue or final clause of the proposition is specifically stated as a question in the formulation; but in the play itself it should be stated *tacitly* as soon as the precipitating act occurs. If the alternatives are not clearly realized by the audience then, the proposition must be faulty, and is likely to fail in its effect. The question always carries alternatives for the dominant side of the story. If the "under dog" tries to escape the oppression of the unsympathetic side, so-and-so will happen; if it remains under the oppression, that condition will be intolerable. If the question is, "Will he succeed?" there will be drama in it only in proportion to the degree in which the alternative seems to be certain failure. The result of the action is given in the form of a question because it represents two conflicting aims, either of which may be realized in the outcome. The question may be presented in the form of what the dramatist would like to see evolve, but the alternative is always understood. Therefore, the question may be considered double—will what the audience desires ensue, *or* will their worst fears come true? The sympathetic party really is, "on the horns of a dilemma." That dramatist who presents such an issue, or the materials for such an issue, to his audience, and fails to give the rest of it, is evading his obligation to his public and risking failure.

Because the dramatic problem consists of two sides in opposition, the common interpretation of Price's proposition has been that the conditions of the action represent one side and the cause of the action the other. This is a natural mistake but a very misleading one. The cause of the action is not the statement of the second side of the problem, but the last fact of that side that makes the opposition complete. Austin Strong saw this very clearly when he said that the cause of the action is the intensification of "little question" into "big question." The result of the action is advantageously stated in the form of a question simply because it emphasizes, and keeps in the forefront of the playwright's atten-

tion, the fact that that part of the play is primarily an issue and not a mere settlement of issue.

To clarify this still further, one may take a play in which there is comparatively little physical action, and reduce it to proposition. At random I take Strindberg's "The Father." The conditions of the action are that Captain Adolph and his wife Laura each seeks to train their child in a particular way; and at the outset it appears that Adolph will have his way because the law gives him the right as the child's father. The cause of the action is that Laura demolishes this authority by declaring that the child is not his, a point upon which her testimony quite certainly will be accepted. Result of the action: Will Adolph be able to raise the child his way without the backing of the law, or will he be compelled to surrender it to Laura as the child's only certain parent? In working out this question, Adolph tries to murder his wife, whereupon Laura has him adjudged insane and deprived of his civil rights, leaving Laura the legal guardian of the child. In the first clause it appears that the father, supported by the law, is firmly fixed in command of the situation. The cause of the action brings Laura to a position of power equal to that of her husband. The contestants unexpectedly—for the audience thought at first that the father was so certain to win that there could be no real issue over it—become evenly matched. As a clear-cut, complete, dramatic situation "The Father" is an admirable example.

To find a proposition in a mass of rough material is not easy. Almost always some element has to be added to give it the necessary structure. To discover what material is useful, the simplest method is perhaps to study each side of the opposition separately. Each side consists of an act of aggravation and an act of aggression. Regarding the sides by themselves, each for the time may be considered the sympathetic side because each, from its own standpoint, has a justifiable end to gain. But when the two sides are brought together for their dramatic structure, the aggressive act of the side that the author wants to be the sympathetic side, should be the precipitating act of the play.⁷

⁷ Further illustration of this method is given in Chapter XX.

Now you have the theory of playmaking and its working hypotheses. Everything that I shall have to say in future pages is mere amplification of proposition. Yet I impose none of it on any other writer than myself. I ask only that you will give me a simple dramatic story in the fewest practicable strokes, which is no more than is asked of any other artist in any other line. The man who can do that is using a proper method, whatever it may be.

If he cannot do that in his way, however, I suggest for his use this method as one that positively works.

PART FOUR

PLOT

CHAPTER XI

THE "MUST" SCENES

AT THE close of the preceding chapter I left you at a point of doubtful knowledge. You had been given considerations of what an audience demands in a play, and told how to define a dramatic subject; but you were told also that the play proper comes after the "precipitating act," a part that, so far as the foregoing chapters have been concerned, is an untracked wilderness. With proposition established, you are merely ready to begin; the story is "all set" as to circumstances, but absolutely nowhere as to development. It is to blaze this needed trail that the present chapter is written.

Proposition is the microcosm of a play; and it is therefore possible to work out from it the required elements. It establishes not only the circumstances from which the action proper grows—the "situation," if you like—but also the result of the action. When the struggle begins, you, as the dramatist, know which side is to become the victor; and this is the key to your problem.

DEVELOPING THE PLAY IDEA

IT REQUIRES a little detective work, but only a little. You have decided which is the sympathetic side of the issue; and you know that the story of the play is the story of that side.

Therefore, and knowing also the end of your play—which very likely is the victory of the sympathetic side—all you have to do is to mark off the great steps necessarily taken by the sympathetic side to reach that end from the time of the precipitating act.¹

Now it may be that your temperament is such that you require no more. I say this with all earnestness. Frederic Van Rensselaer Dey, the prolific author of "Nick Carter," could not use more. Given his main situation and his objective, he asked nothing further. He told me that he couldn't work with a particular plan because it killed his own interest. He wanted to be just as much in doubt about the successive incidents of his story as the reader.² By pegging away at the solution of his given problem *with his readers*, he infused in his own story his own full enthusiasm, working at white heat all the while and leaving his typewriter only when he had cooled. Certainly this method of work has much to commend it.

Personally, I can't work that way. I develop my story plan to the limit before I do a line of final playwriting. I have to know all my characters and what they do in minute detail before I can present them earnestly in life. In my first draft I cannot even try to keep abreast or a little ahead of the reader's interest. My finished work is rather that of a reporter who having witnessed an event or received first-hand information about it, describes it breathlessly. When I have completed my plan, my story lives and breathes and acts itself out before me; but until then I cannot put down on paper my account of what has transpired.³

¹ Authors have been known ere now to build up central situations so tight that nothing save the Hand of God could unravel them reasonably. Play problems of this kind obviously are unpromising material. See Archer's "Play-Making," Chap. XX, entitled, "Blind-Alley Themes."

² Certainly the writer's own interest is important because having it, he will give that much more to his work. Which makes me think of the French landscape painter, Charles Daubigny. He frequently showed ducks in his pictures; and it is said of him that when he liked a picture himself, he added a few more ducks.

³ Daniel Frohman, in his "Memories of a Manager" (New York, 1911, p. 33), thus describes the working order of David Belasco and Henry C. DeMille: "Their plays were first constructed without dialogue. This was the most difficult part of their labors. When the framework was decided upon, the dialogue of the acting scenes began."

Probably this is the reason I think fondly of the alleged method of J. C. Leyendecker, the illustrator whose *Saturday Evening Post* covers and collar advertisements are universally admired for their splendidly vigorous, living technique. Their secret seems to be more in apparent swiftness and sureness of bold strokes than in labor of pains. Yet, I am told that the artist first makes a careful pencil sketch, over which he places water colors; and then—having thoroughly “plotted” his ground—he hastily slaps on those distinctive brush-marks in oils. This may not be true of his illustrations to-day, for I heard this long ago; but it shows exactly how it is possible to work spontaneously after the planning is done.

But, of course, “what is one man’s meat is another’s poison.” Sometimes I wish that I might work as blithely as Dey, whose expertness in his own line I much admired; and yet I can’t but feel that the extemporaneous writer loses rather more than he gains. In the first place, the human mind, however comprehensive it may be, has certain limitations. The author working at white heat, is no abler to focus his attention upon more than one thing than the reader he addresses. If he tries to carry all the threads of his story in his head at once, he must, in human probability, neglect some of them. And so it is, I think, that we find that the products of most persons who write that way, are shambling, loosely constructed stories. Moreover, if the author is bored by becoming familiar with his story before he actually writes it, it seems that it must be a rather insignificant tale. In Dey’s case, he specialized on detective stories (concerning Crewe-Moreau, “the two-faced man,” as well as the eternal “Nick”); so he was consistent in attaching prime importance to suspense and surprise. On the other hand, we are considering a developed interest that requires more deliberate planning.

REVISION IS INEVITABLE

I DO not know of a single case—nor do I believe that one exists—where an author has written spontaneously at a single, straightaway sitting, an important play scene that could not

have been improved by preparatory thought. Henrik Ibsen, who probably packed more real life drama into two hours than any other dramatist who ever lived, did so by virtue of laborious advance work. "Long before a sentence was written," says Edmund Gosse in his "Life of Ibsen,"⁴ "he had invented and studied, in its remotest branches, the life-history of the characters who were to move in his play. Nothing was unknown to him of their experience, and for nearly two years, like a coral-insect, he was building up the scheme of them in silence. Odd little objects, fetiches which represented people to him, stood arranged on his writing table, and were never to be touched. He gazed at them, as if by some feat of black magic, he turned them into living persons, typical and yet individual. . . . The actual writing down of the dialogue was often swift and easy, when the period of incubation was complete. Each of Ibsen's plays presupposes a long history behind it, each starts like an ancient Greek tragedy, in the full process of catastrophe. This method of composition was extraordinary, was perhaps in modern times, unparalleled. It accounted in measure for the coherency, the inevitability, of all the detail."

Ibsen's method probably was not "unparalleled," but certainly it was admirable in proving his intense earnestness. For another instance of indefatigable care in laying the literary groundwork, one need only consult Trevelyan's "Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay" where the painstaking method of a great historian is described.

I already have made the point that technical considerations, learned in the apprenticeship period, will become the instincts of good habit and will not interfere in the least with spontaneous composition. Certainly a professional dramatist rendering expert service should not be troubling himself constantly about "rules." That is why I urge you to do all your planning now. It will save you from being distracted later. I don't care whether you do it on paper or confine it to your head, although I may suggest that in a new line of endeavor the written record may be safer. Goethe was in the habit

⁴ New York, 1911, p. 240.

of preparing his work mentally. He spoke of it while remarking Schiller's habit of pestering himself with rules. "It was sad," said Goethe, "to see how so highly gifted a man tormented himself with philosophical disquisitions which could in no way profit him. Humbolt has shown me letters which Schiller wrote to him in those unblest days of speculation. There we see how he plagued himself with the design of perfectly separating sentimental from naïve poetry. . . . It was not Schiller's plan to go to work with a certain unconsciousness, and as it were instinctively; he was forced, on the contrary, to reflect on all he did. . . . On the other hand, it was contrary to my nature to talk over my poetic plans with anybody—even with Schiller. I carried everything about with me in silence, and usually nothing was known to anyone till the whole was completed."⁵

Which points to an additional merit of the method I am trying to demonstrate. When you have established your proposition you never have to go back to adjust it. It is a completed step forward. In the same manner, plot, which is the present concern, is another step forward that need not be retraced. I appreciate the force of this a little more when I think of the words of Will S. Taylor, who taught me all the practical things I know about graphic art. "Whenever you leave your work," he said, "be sure that the whole drawing is complete up to that stage. If you are just blocking it out, block it *all* out before you leave it. If you are massing in the shadows, mass them *all* in before turning to something else."

This observation is exceedingly wise. If you work out your particular problem in all its aspects, you need not bother with it again. In other words, don't write a clause of your proposition and then try to go into plot; take proposition and plot one at a time. You may feel the inclination to jump around; but it isn't clean-cut thinking. Orderly thought is a habit that may be cultivated like any other.

⁵ "Conversations of Goethe," Friday, Nov. 14, 1823.

ROUGHING-OUT THE PLOT

AT ALL events you now are figuring out the steps necessarily taken by the sympathetic side of the action after the precipitating act, to reach the predetermined end of the main issue. It is known that the families of Montague and Capulet are to be reconciled by the tragic outcome of the marriage of Romeo and Juliet; how are matters to progress to accomplish this result? It is known that Hamlet, having determined the guilt of his suspicious uncle, is going to kill him; how is it coming about?

It is clear that the mainsprings of all possible action are in the circumstances out of which the issue grows. In the material there we find every possibility of action that develops. Hamlet, being such a person in the said environment, may act only thus and so; Romeo and Juliet, circumscribed by barriers of family enmity, may work out their destinies within given limits.

Mark down the steps very roughly in a column. What does the sympathetic side of the action have to do in order to reach the goal, which is the end of the play? I'll be specific. And by way of varying the illustrations, let us take the proposition of another historical play, "Wolfe and Montcalm," which lies here on my table:

*(Sympathetic Side)**(Unsympathetic Side)*

Montcalm, military commander of New France, which has endeavored to drive the Thirteen English Colonies from the North American continent which she wants for development of her fur-trade, has, in conjunction with his jealous rival, Vaudreuil, governor-general of the Colony, resisted the siege of Quebec by an English expedition under James Wolfe, until now the

coming of winter bids fair to drive Wolfe and his comrades away.

Wolfe, in honor bound to make an assault before retiring, brings a body of troops to the enemy shore by pretending that they are convoying needed supplies for Montcalm, preparatory to scaling the heights of Quebec, from which the cocksure Vaudreuil has withdrawn the usual guards.

A suspicious French sentry gives the alarm, while the French guns that then cut off Wolfe's expected reinforcements, draw Montcalm to the scene.

Wolfe and his men meanwhile climb the heights of Quebec and prepare for battle with the defenders of the town.

Will Wolfe capture Quebec and so determine the mastery of the North American continent for England, or will Montcalm defeat him and retain continental control for France?

History has defined the outcome of this problem; Wolfe himself did not capture Quebec, but his men, acting by his instructions, did. The steps necessary to accomplish this were:

Wolfe's men, acting in accordance with his last orders, drive Montcalm back into town, mortally wounding Montcalm.

Following this, the English entrench themselves on the plains to besiege the town at close range.

Considering this with the critical eye, one notices that the action "lets down" as soon as Wolfe's men defeat Montcalm. This is where the unsympathetic side must be brought in. As remarked before, the unsympathetic side is of dramatic value only for the reaction it produces on the sympathetic side. Consequently, we look in the historical material for merely

those phases of the French movements that sustain maximum interest in the English. In that way we provide facts for the unsympathetic side in the following order:

Montcalm is unable to assemble the number of troops he deems necessary because of the antagonism of Vaudreuil, but with those who do rally at his call, he charges the English on the plains, and Wolfe is killed.

Wolfe's men, acting in accordance with his last orders, drive Montcalm back into the town, mortally wounding that leader.

The Indian allies of the French now prepare to descend on the divided English ranks.

The English, seeing their danger, are forced to give up their pursuit and close their ranks; but following this they entrench themselves on the plains to besiege the town at close quarters.

Vaudreuil and the body of French troops evacuate Quebec, and further resistance being useless, the town surrenders.

So, apparently out of nothing at all, the action that follows the precipitating act is evolved. You have roughed-out your plot.

DEDUCTIONS FROM FACT

THE whole "secret" is to question your proposition facts. If you take any statement and try to explain its whys and wherefores in order to make it intelligible, you necessarily will add to your store of knowledge. Similarly, by taking the separate facts in your proposition and working out "the because" of each, your stock of working material will grow; and from this you evolve plot. As W. T. Price used to say,

"Plot is the *because* of Proposition." First come the successive steps of the sympathetic side; and then, dovetailed into these, the useful parts of the unsympathetic side. There will be more or less trimming and fitting to make the action move as smoothly as you want it to; but in the end you will have an action that will warm the cockles of your professional heart.

The qualifying facts that I have given you in the very full proposition of "Wolfe and Montcalm" were obtained in that manner. Take the first statement of the unsympathetic side in its barest form and see how it may be filled out. Montcalm has resisted the siege of Quebec by James Wolfe until the coming of winter bids fair to drive Wolfe and his comrades away. Who is Montcalm? The military commander of New France. Who is Wolfe? The general of the British expedition against Quebec. Why is Wolfe attacking Quebec? Because it is the capital of New France. Why is England interested in reducing New France? Because New France has tried to drive the Thirteen English Colonies from the continent. Why has New France done this? Because she wants the continent for development of her fur-trade. Why? Because the lucrative fur-trade is a source of income for a degenerate court overseas. Why will the coming of winter drive Wolfe away? Because if he remains his ships will be frozen in the St. Lawrence. And so on. All questions that will be asked tacitly by the audience. But you have the method, so it adds nothing to continue. If you were drawing upon imagination instead of history you would merely invent the causes of your effects instead of selecting them.

SCÈNES À FAIRE

SCHILLER points out that a play is not merely an imitation of an action, but of the events leading up to that action.⁶ while Goethe specifically says that a piece constructed so as to be fit for the theater, must be a succession of significant incidents.⁷ These significant incidents surely are the "must"

⁶ Clark's "European Theories of the Drama."

⁷ *Ibid.*

scenes, the necessary scenes, of the play—what Price designates as “plot” scenes. Then there is the insight of Francisque Sarcey again. He spoke many times of the *scène à faire*, that is, “the scene that must be made.”

“If any one of these essential scenes is shirked by the playwright,” comments Brander Matthews,⁸ “if he describes it in his dialogue, instead of letting the spectators see it for themselves, then the audience will be disappointed and their interest will flag. The spectators may not be able to declare the reason for their dissatisfaction; but they will be vaguely aware that they have been deprived of something to which they were entitled. They feel that they have been defrauded of their just expectations if they are not made eye-witnesses of a vital incident which the inexperienced dramatist has chosen to bring about behind closed doors or during one of the intermissions between the acts. Sarcey insisted that here was a certain test of the born playwrights, of the artists who have an instinctive mastery of the theater, that they have always an unerring intuition as to the meetings which the spectators will expect to see. Now, what are the essential scenes without which a play will fail to impress the audience? What are those scenes which must be shown in action? Obviously, they are the scenes in which we can see the struggle of contending wills. They are the episodes wherein the dramatic conflict enters on its acutest stage, the interviews wherein there is the actual collision of the several resolves, the clash of volition against volition.”

William Archer accepts Sarcey's description in the main, and devotes a chapter in his book “Play-Making,” to what *he* calls “the obligatory scene.” He divides obligatory scenes into several categories apart from scenes exclusively of plot, scenes that the audience feels are necessary because of purely emotional stress or for character development, and so forth—all quite true, but, I fear, unduly analytical. The really “must” scenes of a play are those that tell the story; a play can get on without refinements, although, of course, it will be a much better play for having them. This is mere restate-

⁸ “A Study of the Drama,” by Brander Matthews, Boston, 1910, p. 105 f.

Norma

Act I

- ① Flowers for Norma -
- ② Jimmie meets Dr and Star as he returns to dining room. The two men talk - establish cordial comprehension of each other's point of view. Established old man's delusion about Norma - excite audience suspicion
- ③ Jimmie comes from dining room. Tells that Norma is now struck on an out side named Michael. Dr takes notice -
- ④ Norma comes ~~establishes first quality~~ 90. Laddies about Mike. Shows that it fits home. Dr's suspicion increased
- ⑤ Calves with Stanley established first. Get that he don't mess him. He Betty he to same as that. He can go with Michael.
- ⑥ ~~Dr - has of look for glasses~~ Dr - has of look for glasses
wondering in and out doors. First scene

Courtesy of George Abbott

PAGE FROM THE ORIGINAL PLAN OF "COQUETTE"

Mr. Abbott explains as follows: "Miss Bridgers and I had been working for some two years on a comedy about a little southern girl named Norma. We had finally given it up as a bad job when Miss Bridgers happened to say that there was a tragedy to be written around the character. I asked her what. She said it was vague in her mind, but she would 'phone me. About two days later she called me up and told me the plot of 'Coquette' as it now stands. It clicked with me immediately. I left off the piece I was writing on, made the rough scenario and completed the rough draft in about two and a half weeks. This is a page from that scenario."

ment in a new connection of what I have said about plays being good, better and best.

Sarcey's remark that the practice of showing necessary scenes in full view of the audience is a true test of play-writing ability, is an exceedingly shrewd one. So many of the "Great Unproduced" have a positive knack for leaving out vital parts of the action; and now and then you will find one defending his stupidity on the ground that it is "suggestive" and "symbolical" instead of just obscure. I am sure that I have a fairly good appreciation of suggestiveness and symbolism as active dramatic principles; but I lose all patience with persons who apply them by carefully deleting all possible clues to their meaning.

The failure to show "must" scenes on the stage is not, however, confined to novices. The lack is to be seen in "The New Sin," by B. Macdonald Hastings, where the hero suffers excruciatingly from importuning relatives who never really importune and where various other omissions are not compensated for by telling about them. This play, originally produced in New York in 1912 as an importation from the London stage, revived in 1927 and a pronounced failure on both occasions, laid great claim to attention on grounds of novelty, having no women in the cast, a previously untouched theme and no real lapses of time. The failures were not due to the absence of women or to any other novel phase, but to exceedingly bad construction, notably neglect of *scènes à faire*.⁹ Another inexcusable play in which many things of importance happened offstage, was Somerset Maugham's drama "The Explorer," produced in New York in the same year. The hero of this play, in deference to the wishes of the woman he loves, takes her younger brother with him to Africa that the boy may redeem the sullied honor of his family. The boy disgraces himself instead; but the explorer, giving him one more chance to make good, inadvertently

⁹ In this matter, as in all other phases of playwriting, the author is called upon to discriminate. Here he is required to determine whether, in the given circumstances, it is better to show the scene or to have the audience divine it. Brander Matthews has an interesting discussion of this point in his "The Principles of Playmaking" (New York, 1919, Chap. I). The thing is to decide whether the fact shall be real and present or not. That the *impression* shall be real and present is never in doubt.

sends him to his death. The explorer finds himself accused, upon his return home to London, of killing the boy, but for the sake of the woman he loves, refuses to explain. Some one else tells her the truth, however, and she accepts him for his bravery in sparing her. The entire play passes in London. The boy's disgrace, the explorer's effort to give him another chance, the boy's death, the accusation, the truthful explanation and much more, all pass outside the scene. And of course the play—if play it may be called—failed dismally.

Several years ago I had to edit a film wherein it was highly important that an uncouth country girl should go to the big city, and in an incredibly short time, become, by legitimate means, a star actress; yet the whole picture contained not a single scene showing her in a theater—or, indeed, anywhere at all in the metropolis. I managed ultimately to "fake" a view of the little lady on the stage while an audience in "stock shots" applauded her; but this was a mere alibi for omission of a plot scene that should have been indicated by the continuity writer and supplied by the director. If a director has photographed all of his "must" scenes, a film editor has comparatively little difficulty in accomplishing his part of the work; but if there are gaps along the main line, herculean efforts are required to bridge them. I venture to say that a good one-third of the "retakes" necessary in motion picture studios after productions are nominally completed, consists of new scenes that could just as well have been anticipated in production. The other two-thirds are just scenes remade because of faulty lighting, careless costuming, unmatched action in closeup and long shots, and the like—pardonable matters due to normal human frailty.

CHAPTER XII

SEQUENCE OF FACTS

A FULLY developed plot should provide every main point in the story, every important turn of events. Accordingly, in working out the plot of "Wolfe and Montcalm," additional steps of each side were contrived to make the story intelligible and self-developing in interest. The circumstances of the action had to be divided into shorter steps so too much information would not be hurled at the spectator's head at once, and more turns had to appear, for the same reason, in explanation of the concluding facts.

MISSING LINKS

ALSO, if the body of the play is that part that comes after the precipitating act, it must have extent. That is to say, the action must be sustained there as long as possible; the problem stated must not be solved immediately or the play will be over. Moreover, facts must have time to sink in. Of course, the problem in the first place should be of such magnitude that it cannot be solved at once; it should occupy the full allotted portion of acting time. However, that is easier said than done. More often than not the dramatist is obliged to resort to padding his action. This requires skill, because it must not be obvious stalling for time.

The simplest, and perhaps most effective way to postpone the finish is to strengthen the obstructive work of the unsympathetic side, which naturally stiffens the hero's problem and gives him that much more to do. Precisely how to work this depends altogether on the material. When it is accomplished, the play must still have its main line of interest moving

swiftly to the end, and every part must belong. The structure must be adjusted at every point to accommodate it to the new extent. There must be no digressions and no duplicated action.

When a well-made play is finished it has a certain length that cannot be altered without loss. It may be shortened in performance by speeding the actors; but this will be changing the tempo, which must be a degree of sacrifice as there is but one correct tempo. It may be lengthened by adding new material; but this will be sheer interpolation which must interrupt the smooth flow of interest because no room has been made for it in the original plan. There is only one proper length for any well-written play; and that is the length which is most effective. There is only one time to pad a play; and that is when the fundamental structure is still undetermined.

Adroitness in selecting the high spots of a story, and in making all the complementary parts essential, too, gives the spectator the feeling that his time is not being wasted. He is there only when something vital is happening; he is "in at the death," as it were. This ability to present just the cream of a dramatic action truly is characteristic of the most successful craftsmen. It proves the trained, discriminatory eye. Suppose you were called upon to write the story of Jack and Jill. Could you state it much more pungently than in the form already sung in the nursery?

Jack and Jill
Went up a hill
To fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down
And broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

Even to make "Hey-diddle-diddle" more compact would be a pretty difficult matter, because there the whole aim is the ludicrous effect of an impossible combination; and that effect requires not less than a cat and a fiddle, a cow jumping over the moon, a laughing dog and a peripatetic dish and a spoon.¹

¹ There is great risk in speculating on the purpose of Mother Goose. "Five-and-twenty blackbirds," for instance, really had a caustic political interpretation, and "Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross" also had topical allusions.

In plotting an action, don't think about the expository material that must open your play. Start out as though the first gripping scene is the real beginning, with facts of identity, time, place and so forth, understood. When the scene itself is worked out later, these details may be fitted in. To plant the expository stuff and then prune the gripping scene (which is the life of it all), to fit that, is a most unsatisfactory, devitalizing method.

The simplest beginning to amplify the primary plot, that has been evolved directly from proposition, is to arrange all the events in chronological order, without regard to their dramatic effectiveness. This relieves your mind of considerations of future facts until you are ready to take them up. Chronological order is fairly simple to adjust. A given fact must have happened *before* some other fact, and *after* another; otherwise, this or that state of affairs would not be possible at this point in the story.

THE MOST INTERESTING ARRANGEMENT

BUT when it comes to establishing the dramatic order, the choice of position is infinitely more difficult. Will it be more effective to have Jill fall down before Jack, or should Jack fall first? Which order will be the most interesting?

On the opening night of "Secret Service," William Gillette, author-actor, in the rôle of the telegraph operator who was sending a vital message through to the Union lines, had an arrangement of little facts designed to elicit a heavy round of applause. According to the play, he was coming to the important part of his message when he was shot in the wrist. He stopped for a moment, bound up his wrist with his handkerchief, picked up his cigar and went on sending. Gillette thought that this demonstration of nerve would "bring down the house." It did not. On the second night he changed the order of facts. After the shot he stopped sending, picked up his cigar, *then* bound up his wrist and went on sending. The applause was tremendous. The magic was that he thought of his cigar *before* he did of his wound.²

² "The Footlights, Fore and Aft," by Channing Pollock, Boston, 1912.

Probably this is the kind of thing that makes a working dramatist first desire a guiding principle. Yet, in the same breath I must confess that there is not much guiding principle to apply. It is mainly a matter of personal taste. Some playwrights are of the opinion that *this* arrangement is more effective, while others think that *that* is better. The audience's applause does not settle the matter, because it may be that a burst of handclapping now will ruin some effect later, the dramatist desiring to hold the demonstration in check till his evidence is all in. So at the same time that a problem of this sort makes the dramatist wish for guidance, it also confirms Kipling's view:

There are nine-and-sixty ways
Of constructing tribal lays,
And every *single*
 one
 of
 them
 is
 right!

Yet, there are a few broad considerations that must be helpful. One of the greatest is to determine the particular value of each fact to the action as a whole. That is to say, will the given fact in this place intensify the impression of the play as a whole more than in some other position?

The impression of the play as a whole rests with the sympathetic side at issue. The story is the story of that side. All the facts in the play are shaped to that end. The purpose of each is to make the sympathetic side more interesting. Accordingly, the test of best position of a fact is the degree of interest it produces on the sympathetic side.

Shakespeare presented the warring families before he stated the love of Romeo and Juliet. Certainly he did this because, with the advance knowledge of the feud, the audience could bestow instant sympathy on the lovers when they arrived. The enmity of the houses of Montague and Capulet had no real significance until the young persons came together; to present it after would have made Romeo and Juliet more

acted-upon than acting. The fact of the enmity becomes active in the main story only when Romeo and Juliet run counter to it. With the lovers given first, it would have been necessary to transfer the attention (and interest) to a secondary element in order to explain why Romeo and Juliet should command sympathy. The master craftsman knew that when the central characters were on the stage they should enjoy the full understanding of the audience; and so he disposed of all matters necessary to intelligibility in advance.

That is why so many plays have the hero discussed at great length by subordinate characters before he makes his first entrance. With everything about him understood, the audience receives him from the first with full appreciation. In stage parlance subordinate characters who do this sort of thing are called "feeders." They just pave the way for the triumphant entry. The hero enters and reaps at a stroke the harvest they have laboriously planted and tilled.³ They have no cause for complaint because it is the hero's play; everything in it, including the feeders themselves, belongs to him.

This refers to the great dramatic principle known wherever there is dramatic art, as Preparation. There can be no issue unless the materials for issue have been "planted." You can have no full dramatic action until the audience begins "putting two and two together"—until the audience interprets probable outcome of present facts in the light of some other fact known previously. But it is not yet time to discuss Preparation. It is enough to indicate its general value for the broad requirements of plot.

³ This matter is more fully discussed in Chapter XXIX. The term "feeder" is more commonly applied to the character who utters a line of dialogue that prepares the way for another character to make a bright retort. The plan may be seen in operation in vaudeville where a comedian usually has a companion who "plays straight"—that is, without eccentric makeup—and "feeds" him material for his gags. It is a remarkable fact that a good feeder frequently is a better actor than the scintillating principal, probably because he has trained himself to "listen," or to react emotionally to everything said or done by the principal; and when a vaudeville team breaks up after a few seasons of service, the "feeder" usually emerges in the public eye as the more popular of the two.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FORWARD MOVEMENT

SO SOON as reference is made to sympathetic and unsympathetic sides the subject of conflict rises once more.

The forward movement of plot is really zigzag, that is, from unsympathetic side to sympathetic side and so on to the end, illustrated very well in the analysis of the plot of "Hamlet" in earlier pages.¹ This seems to mean that a play consists of two stories running concurrently; but in the dramatist's realization of that there is grave danger that he will amplify these two stories equally. The fact is that the play consists of only one story. The second thread exists wholly to provide the opposition of ideas necessary to dramatic interest in the central theme; so that second thread should be as sketchy as possible. I have said this before, just as I will reiterate many other things in applying the stated theory to actual practice. Plot and counterplot, strictly speaking, is not the best movement of a story, for, by dividing the attention, it implies a constant alternation in the audience's sympathy and point of view. The audience's sympathy and point of view should always be on the main line.

THE MAIN LINE OF INTEREST

TO GIVE attention to the unsympathetic side does not necessarily involve bestowing sympathy upon it. Sympathy—the warm, human-relationship feeling—is evoked by real or apparent virtue, or by a need of justice. If you treat the villain too shamefully, there will be a revulsion of feeling in favor of fair play to him, in which case the sympathy will

¹ Pp. 86-7.

shift to him; but this will be virtually impossible if the hero is struggling upward against odds created by the villain. But whether the matter presented about the unsympathetic side is long or short, it should be so handled that it is weighed by the audience altogether in terms of the main object of interest.

The manner of doing this will be clearer if I speak of the work of the expert stage dramatist in writing a star play. He contrives everything to enhance the star just as you now seek to enhance the sympathetic side; and his ingenuity is peculiarly evident in his dialogue. In the first place he knows that, generally speaking, the audience is more interested in reactions than in impulses, that when one person asks a question, the chances are that the audience will be interested primarily in the answer and hence in the person answering. So note the throwback of the audience's attention in this quotation:

JANET. May I use the telephone, Alice?

ALICE. You know where it is, don't you?

JANET. Thanks. I'll help myself.

Here Janet is the star. She is compelled to ask Alice's permission to use the instrument, whereupon the attention of the audience turns to Alice; but Alice answers with another question that throws the attention back to Janet.

So it is that the unsympathetic side of the action keeps throwing the interest back to the main line. It would be instructive to show you how when stars are compelled to ask questions they sometimes change the order of the words in order to keep the attention as much as possible to themselves, how, instead of asking, "Are you quite sure?" they will say, "You are quite sure?" which turns it into more of a flat statement. But these are matters that I cite in this place merely by way of illustration. They are given more extended consideration later in the chapters on Dialogue. The point they make here is that the main line of interest must enjoy a monopoly of attention by every hook or crook of the playwright's art—that is, if the play is to be better than just good.

The drama proper is kept up by the constant assertion of the "menace," or unsympathetic side. It is a sustained issue,

a problem in solution. If there is no problem there is likely to be no play. It is a curious fact that when human happiness (which is to say, virtuous self-sufficiency without any counter principle), is achieved in a play, people lose interest in it. "The story is over after the clinch."² We are truly interested and stirred only when rightful happiness is menaced. I wonder parenthetically, therefore, whether or not it is possible to make an interesting, thoroughly absorbing play, out of unalloyed happiness from start to finish. W. L. George, in his romance, "Children of the Morning" (New York, 1927), has graphically described the miseries of life on an island where everything has been made absolutely happy and secure.

DRAMATIC NECESSITY

WE SHOULD know just what proportion of fighting equipment to give each side in a play. So let us examine the character of conflict in drama. It would seem that the defensive warfare should be altogether on the sympathetic side because if it is the unprovoked aggressor, the element of necessity is removed. Remove the element of necessity from any play and the audience's interest will let down to a surprising degree. If Hamlet is not *compelled*, by his oath seconded by his conscience, to avenge his father, the conflict will not be inevitable; Hamlet might retire from it at any time. Because he *must* fight his uncle to the death, because the uncle is out to get Hamlet if Hamlet does not get him, the interest of the audience is intense. Because Sir Thomas Dale in the aforementioned historical play, "Jamestown," *must* rule with a rod of iron or see the colony fall before the machinations of Spain, we are interested to a high degree in what he does. Because George Washington and Governor Dinwiddie *must* win the Ohio region, in the other historical unit, "The Gateway to the West," or see the Thirteen English Colonies shut in forever on a narrow strip of seaboard, we desire keenly to know the outcome.

² Professional patter meaning the happy ending, or embrace of hero and heroine at close of the play.

The necessity need not be known to the characters, but it must be known to the audience. The Two Dromios do not understand their confusion of identities that makes the audience laugh. Romeo and Juliet are unaware of each other's identity when they fall in love. The dramatic action of that time is altogether in the minds of the spectators. What characters know is only enough to give their actions verisimilitude; the important condition is the omniscient knowledge of the audience.

Here lies the good sense with which that ancient moot question of the theater about keeping a secret from an audience, may be decided. If the audience needs the information for its full enjoyment, by all means give it. Charles Lamb's play "Mr. H." might have been a success instead of a failure hissed and booed by the author along with the rest of the spectators, if he had told the audience early in the action that his hero's name was Hogsflesh, and that the predicament, in which Mr. H. became placed through his refusal to tell that name, was founded only in his pardonable shame.³

IRREGULARITIES

I HAVE refrained until now from discussing some possible irregularities in the alternation of sympathetic and unsympathetic sides. It is not always possible or advisable to have a plot move strictly in this manner. An ideally constructed dramatic action probably would do so; but, as I have said many times before in one way or another, we try to meet the ideal arrangement only in so far as the living truth of our material will permit. We are trying to express truth in the most effective manner commensurate with the medium we use, not to make an intricate design. There is no merit in that. In fact, it is quite important to disarm suspicion of design by including irregularities.

For instance, the villain need not do all the evil work. Any wind that blows in his direction fills his sails; and while

³ This is the frank opinion of Brander Matthews expressed mainly in a chapter on Charles Lamb in his "Studies of the Stage," New York, 1894. Concerning "keeping a secret from the audience," see interesting data collected by William Archer in his "Play-Making," Boston, 1912.

it would be rather more helpful to focused attention if he did his own damage, the damage done by any one else will serve the purpose of producing a reaction on the sympathetic side. The injury may be done unwittingly by the sympathetic side itself. Thus, the discovery by Romeo and Juliet after they have fallen in love, that their families are at deadly enmity, is an act to all intents and purposes committed by the families—just as effective as if the families had stepped forth in person to forbid their love. So, in "Jamestown," English colonists who refuse to assist Dale to make the settlement strong really are working on the side of Spain, the great enemy. "Who is not with us is against us."

It has seemed to me inadvisable to permit work along the main line of interest to be done by any other than the sympathetic side itself, whereas a division of labor on the part of the unsympathetic side actually offers a certain force in providing more odds for the hero to overcome.⁴ In "Jamestown" the historical material was so varied that I could not be as specific as I would have liked, in my parties at issue. On one hand was England, represented by Sir Thomas Dale; on the other was Spain, represented mainly by Don Diego de Molina, although at various times in the action Spain used other agents, notably the Indians. The issue cannot change its character but it may change its circumstances. In "Wolfe and Montcalm" the respective representatives of England and France, the parties at issue, are killed before the great problem of the action, the mastery of the North American continent, is settled; and the close of the action is therefore negotiated by others than Wolfe and Montcalm. History did not permit the ideal plot structure, so it was necessary to compromise and come as close as we could.

A story moves forward by virtue of its self-contained elements of progression. The sort of action that has to reach out every now and then for an outside complication to keep it going can move only by fits and starts, and cannot have

⁴ A dramatist friend invited me to attend performance of one of his stage plays that was being "tried out" by a stock company some time ago, to see if I might discover faults. To my mind these were primarily that the sympathetic side was double: a henpecked husband and his abused daughter vs. a cruel stepmother.

full cumulative strength. The flow of interest should be steady and growing in power; and to achieve this condition the plot structure should be a smooth-working mechanism. Each turn of the plot should be automatic and self-starting. This brings us closer to the need of defining the precise proportion of a plot turn to be assigned to each side concerned in the issue. How much does the sympathetic side have to do and how much does the unsympathetic side have to do to move the plot forward one step?

We already have determined that the unsympathetic side does only enough to motivate the acts of the sympathetic side. After the precipitation of the issue, its function is to try to block the sympathetic side throughout its great struggle to the end. At times it may not require especial assertion, as when the hero, tunneling his way to freedom from his prison cell, finds to his dismay that he has arrived in the guardhouse—a favorite formula of Boucicault in his melodramas—but it should always be present, whether requiring assertion or not.

The sympathetic side, however, occupying the center of the stage, so to speak, is obliged to do much more. The hero must react to the aggression of the unsympathetic side by *doing something* to counter it; his reaction must always be converted into action of his own. Here we come again to the importance of an assertion of will. A mere declaration of intention on the part of a character does not usually suffice to turn the plot unless that declaration is the producing cause of a reaction elsewhere. The intention must be put into execution. Hamlet, having vowed to avenge his father's death, must betray his perturbed state of mind that his guilty uncle may suspect Hamlet's suspicion of him; and the uncle, in turn, must convert his feeling into action by preparing to sound Hamlet through Ophelia, which next leads Hamlet to jilt the girl. And so you may follow each turn of the plot of this great play, seeing how each reaction is converted immediately into action, into reaction, into action and so on in interlocking steps to the end. A plot step must be an active fact; if it is passive or negative, it will not carry the action on. When you study the steps of the main line of

interest in detail you will find that each plot step consists of an unsatisfactory, oppressive condition created by the unsympathetic side for the sympathetic side, followed by a move of the hero to remedy it.

One of the commonest faults of amateur playwrights is their failure to realize this perfectly normal, human way of converting every impulse into action.⁵ The step is not complete until this is done. The amateur will ring down his curtain on the hero declaring that now he is going out after the villain's scalp; the trained dramatist will show the hero on his way. There is no real issue until the sides go to combat. Is it not in "The Pirates of Penzance" that the policemen sing, "We go! We go!" until some one suggests that they'd better do it?

In an action that deals with a problem the solution of which is imperative, the dramatic inaction of either side must disrupt the flow of interest. There is a forward movement of the whole that must be maintained for maximum interest and sympathy. If your plot lacks this automatic, consistent advance to the logical end, do not attempt to write your play from it until you have perfected the structure.

Having reached that stage, you will see the force of the age-old remark of Menander that having selected his plot he looked upon his comedy as three parts finished.

⁵ "The whole neural organism, it will be remembered, is, physiologically considered, but a machine for converting stimuli into reactions."—William James, "Psychology." Elsewhere in the same work he says, "All states of mind are motor in their consequences." P. 370 ff.



PART FIVE

THE SEQUENCE

CHAPTER XIV

THE LONG STEP

A GOOD play, like a good anecdote, progresses to a point. When that point is made, the object of the play or the anecdote is achieved. The successive scenes of the play are so many steps in attainment. In other words, plot, as has been demonstrated, has a distinctly forward movement. There is no retrograde movement about it. "The footsteps frighten me," said the fox in Æsop's fable, noting that there were no prints backward from the lion's lair.

STORIES FOR CHARACTERS

CONTINUED interest implies progress, an increase of knowledge about the object of attention—never a diminution. Moreover, the progress leads necessarily to an improved understanding on the part of the audience. The peculiar force of this is proved by the repeated failures in popularity of plays that have sought merely to enlarge the individual understandings of their characters.

Take a story in which a man concludes that the only way to succeed in this world is to be dishonest, and which proves that he is wrong. The audience knows at the outset that dishonesty ultimately never pays, and the action seems to them to be on the whole much ado about nothing. It is static. Take "Children of Earth," Alice Brown's otherwise

thoughtful and praiseworthy drama of New England life that won the Ames \$10,000 prize and that endured in the Broadway district for only five weeks. The action concerned a spinster who decided that she had a right to be happy by eloping with her unhappily married, next-door neighbor. She ran off with him, only to return promptly because she learned that such a course is no more justifiable in the eyes of God than it is in the eyes of man. All the audience could do at the end was to shrug their shoulders and say that they knew it all the time. Perhaps in the last analysis the explanation of the play's failure is that it is the story not of a sympathetic woman, but of a very foolish woman, *less* to be pitied than scorned. But the fact remains that the play had no real forward movement of story; it ended at virtually the same place where it began. Barrie's "The Admirable Crichton" also ends where it began as far as the characters are concerned; but the audience by that time has made a very considerable change in viewpoint.

This is not to say that the dramatist should discuss social conventions only along conformist lines. The point is rather to avoid discussing them unless through such presentation the audience may either confirm the truth positively in their own minds or gain a new point of view. This is enlargement of understanding, or progress of story. François Coppée, in his short story "Le Coupable" (which was dramatized by Ruth Helen Davis and the late Charles Klein and subsequently "picturized" for Thomas H. Ince), thus presents a new aspect of an old social verdict by stating that the father of an illegitimate child is responsible for its acts. Again, C. Gardner Sullivan added to the trite observation that "war makes of men a vast machine" that "we must not forget that every cog is human"; and beginning there—it is substantially his opening title—he built for H. B. Warner his interesting photoplay, "Shell 43," which demonstrated that the strongest cog of all had human weakness.

Demonstration is precisely the word. By demonstration of a subject in its completeness we give the audience materials for its own conclusions. The subject must unfold itself in all its aspects. The atmosphere of the play must be cleared

of all dust, or the end will not be considered satisfying.¹ The issue must be threshed out in the light of day. So we have what I call the "blue sky" character of most drama. If the story deals with a closet skeleton, you may depend upon it that the rattling bones ultimately will out; the woman's past will be aired—the soiled linen washed in public. In all probability there will be nothing about the issue that will not be fought to a frazzle before the iris closes or the curtain falls.

DANGERS OF REPETITION

DRAMATIC action must be progressive—whence we get the good old "rule" that action should not be duplicated. Complete repetition necessarily brings action to a standstill. The common sense of this seems indubitable; yet it has ramifications that easily become pitfalls for the unwary. For example, action performed by different sets of characters may still be duplicated. Tom Jones may convince his wife that he has work at the office to alibi his presence at the club poker game; and his friend Bill Billiken may do precisely the same thing to his wife, which really is rehashing the matter for the audience. It is only when the seemingly duplicated action has a new interpretation that it is effective. A millionaire picking up a dime on the street-crossing conveys a very different idea from the same action on the part of a starving man. In the old play "Lend Me Five Shillings" the leading character entangled himself in a new situation every time he uttered the request in the title.

In most cases of duplicated action that I have found, the tendency seemed to come from the author's desire to explain motives, one character to another, instead of just to the audience. If we consider plot motives from the characters' viewpoint alone we find ourselves saying the same things over and over again just to convey one piece of information to different persons of the play. When such repetition is required by

¹ I even go so far as to say that a dramatist who raises an issue and fails to point a way to its settlement, is false to his obligation. It is just the old main fault with most playwriting everywhere, of not thinking things through.

the material, the dramatist should consider all cases of its occurrence, and then should give the audience just that one that is necessary to their intelligent interest, letting the others go so far as possible by implication. The important consideration for the playwright is not what the character knows, but what the audience knows the character knows.²

There is one kind of play where duplicated action is very probable; and that is the type of drama in which the leading character is compelled to eat his own words. That is to say, in which a character declares himself grandiloquently on a given situation only to act contrariwise when he discovers that the situation applies to himself. There is Augustus Thomas's stage play "The Model" (which bore the working title, "When It Comes Home"). A French man of the world called upon to advise his artist friend about marrying for money when he loves his model, suggests that the artist marry for money and keep on loving the model, which takes on a very different complexion when the cosmopolite finds that the model is his own daughter. In C. Gardner Sullivan's photoplay "Sex," starring Louise Glaum, a dancer, careless of the wreckage she causes in another woman's home by alienating the husband's affections, learns what it means when she falls in love herself, marries, and finds her husband neglecting her for another dancer. In both these instances, from stage and screen, skillful handling kept up the interest without stale repetition; but it is easy to see what difficulties might have arisen had the material in either case been shaped by less competent hands. It must be remembered, however, that the question of duplication rests in the mind of the spectator, and what may be literal duplication of action on the stage (as old Nat climbing upstairs to bed in "Shore Acres") may have an entirely separate and distinct meaning to the audience the second time it is done.

So the forward movement of a story does not permit very much digression from the main line of interest.

² In "Pseudolus," one of the comedies of the ancient Roman dramatist Plautus, the author has a character tell a newcomer to the plot that he won't trouble to repeat the news because the audience knows it already. Beginning Verse 720.

ADVANCING THE WHOLE STORY

THE successive scenes of the action constitute steps toward achievement of the play purpose only in so far as they are full strides along the main line of interest. A step carries the *whole* story forward one degree, not merely a part of the story.

The step forward along the main line of interest, may be said to correspond with a chapter in a book. There is one main assertion, and all the rest of the chapter is constituted by the materials out of which the assertion is made. We may draw another analogy in the paragraph; the sentences composing it are mere qualification and amplification of the idea it expresses. There is still another parallel in the sentence, which makes its point with the aid of modifying words and clauses. In each case the materials for the statement are grouped with the statement itself. And all this points to the wisdom of keeping together all the explanatory material that belongs to a step forward in the play plot. The action of that step should be continuous until the step is completed.

Perhaps this seems self-evident. Yet it remarks one of the commonest faults in playwriting. Two characters will enter and establish some small fact that has no interest in itself and that apparently has nothing to do with the case. Then they will go off and a couple more will come on to register another apparently irrelevant fact. This process is repeated several times; and it is only after a considerable lapse that a "key" fact is provided that links the others together and shows just how the preceding material ties in. The absurdity of this method would be patent to the dramatist if he would only consider it. It is as clumsy a method of story-telling as making sentences out of unrelated adjectives, nouns, and prepositions would be.

PROPORTION

A PLAY action is divided naturally into parts because we are not physically constituted so as to be able to apprehend all of its details simultaneously. We may look at the Metropolitan

Tower from a distance and appreciate its proportions; but we cannot, with the same perspective, know its utility. Our acquaintance with the contained merits of a play must progress by stages, each new one enlarging our knowledge of the subject and leading to full understanding. But while we look at the single part, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is only a part. It is a full step; but it progresses toward a goal beyond itself, the impression of the play as a whole. We are told that a whole is no greater than the sum of its parts; but conversely, a part is of no more importance than the place it occupies in the entire scheme.

This matter of unity of subject seems exceedingly difficult for dramatists to understand. The scene upon which they are working now, fills their horizon and they see nothing beyond it. Parts of the story that interest them are seen to be swollen beyond all reason when viewed from a distance, while vital facts are completely overshadowed. Each part should have proportion; and therefore the playwright should be able at all times to step back from his table, just as a painter steps back from his canvas, to see the relationship of what he is doing to the other portions of his work.

In a conception which is broad enough to circumscribe the whole, the whole is likely to be *much greater* than the sum of its parts, just as the strength of an army may actually be greater than the total strength of the soldiers that compose it. The power of Jerome K. Jerome's stage play, "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," easily is greater than the sum of its parts. You may create your driving interest from minor propositions alone, but never so successfully as when the whole play is moved by the great force of a major proposition embracing all the others. As religionists say, "God's law of life gives everything in creation existence, continuity and purpose," for, unquestionably, existence, continuity and purpose are characteristics of good plays.

It is not enough that the unity of the subject be clear in the analytical diagram; it must be clear in the presentation itself. Emphasis should be placed so as to bring out the force of the major proposition. If this is not done, the proposition will be valueless in establishing unity, and will

itself be destroyed. Hartley Manners, author of "Peg o' My Heart," told Harold E. Stearns one day in an interview,³ that he had learned at last one thing in the course of his career: "It is a sort of trick, if you like to call it such," he said, "although it seems to me just a specific case of the old law of clearness. That thing is, repeat the plot. Have the story of the plot, the introduction to the action of the play, simplified and expressed in different form by at least two people at least three times. That is the only way to make sure that what you assume your audience to know for the last two or three acts will be known." Mr. Manners went on to speak of one of his plays which, in his opinion, failed in London for want of this simple precaution: "All the story of the play was contained in a letter which was read early in the first act. Without knowing what was in that letter the rest of the play became unintelligible. On the opening night the girl who was to read the letter was nervous and no one heard her beyond the first few rows. The story in that letter was not given again during the play. Consequently, nobody knew what the play was all about."

This at once suggests the anecdote that has been told repeatedly by Brander Matthews,⁴ about the old stage-manager Bartley, who said to the dramatist Planché, "If you want the British public to understand what you are doing, you must tell them that you are *going* to do it; then that you *are* doing it; and after all you must tell them that you *have* done it. And then, confound them, *perhaps* they may understand you!"

PLOT SUMMARY ⁵

IN ALMOST any of the old plays where the dramatist had to address a turbulent, mixed crowd, the opening circumstances of the action will be found restated two or three times in different ways. Shakespeare does it often. In Carl Jacoby's stage play, "The Riddle: Woman," adapted for America by

³ *New York Press*, December 7, 1913.

⁴ In "A Study of the Drama," in "Principles of Playmaking," and elsewhere.

⁵ See also "Recalling the Plot," in Chap. XXIII of the present work.

21

What was the prayer, Billy. ~~You always manage better.~~ I'm getting so sleepy. . .

Brown
(In a trance-like tone)
Our Father who art in Heaven.

Dion
(Drowsily)
Our Father. . .
(He dies)
(A pause)

(Brown remains in a stupor for a moment - then stirs himself, puts his hand on Dion's breast)

Brown
(Dully)
He's dead -- at last.
(He says this mechanically but the last two words awaken him - wonderingly)
At last?
(Then with triumph)
At last?
(He stares at Dion's real face contemptuously)
So that's the poor weakling you really were! No wonder you hid! And I've always been afraid of you - yes, I'll confess it now, in awe of you! Paugh!
(He picks up the mask from the floor)
No, not of you! Of this! Say what you like, it's strong if it is bad! And this is what Margaret loved, not you! Not you! This man! *The man who melted himself to me!*
(Struck by an idea, he jumps to his feet)
By God! *(He starts to put on the mask)*
(A knocking comes on the street door. He starts guiltily, laying the mask on the table. Then he picks it up again quickly, takes the dead body and carries it off left. He reappears immediately and goes to the front door as the knocking recommences - gruffly)
Hello! Who's there?

Margaret
It's Margaret, Billy. I'm looking for Dion.

Brown
(Uncertainly)
Oh - all right -
(Unfastening door)
Come in. Hello, Margaret. Hello, Boys! He's here. He's asleep. I - I was just dozing off too.

Courtesy of Kenneth Macgowan

EMENDED PAGE FROM "THE GREAT GOD BROWN" BY EUGENE O'NEILL

The above page is one of the least revised of any in the prompt copy from which it was taken; but the two small autograph additions shown here are especially striking. During first rehearsals it was felt that because it was not emphatically clear at this point that Brown assumed the personality of Dion, the whole play was ineffective. These two new pieces of business, therefore, defined Brown's intention. In other parts of the script, where the author's changes were extensive, he followed the ordinary stage practice of writing his revision on the backs of the preceding pages.

Charlotte E. Wells and Dorothy Donnelly, this device to insure clearness is handled with great skill. First the husband, Larz Olrik, proves that he suspects Helsingor, the villain, thereby intensifying the situation for Lilla, the wife, who is in danger of exposure by Helsingor; then Meyer, one of the company, remarks to Lilla that Larz suspects Helsingor of *something*.⁶ The situation is turned upon itself in this manner again and again, giving the audience its perspective each time and incidentally extracting every bit of emotion from the scenes. I do not know whether the deft handling is that of the original author, or of the adapters; but in either case, it is an excellent example of the use of emphasis.

Reginald Barker, the well-known stage and motion picture director, once told Charles Johnson Post (who passed the remark along to me), that in his opinion art is a sense of proportion and accent, adding that he was not sure but that these terms are synonymous. The truth of this remark is far-reaching. The dramatist should never lose sight of his main design; and when his action bids fair to stray into bypaths, he should grasp it firmly and restate his main purpose. This being the place where we encounter another old stage rule, which is that a dramatist should summarize his action at the end of each act. Similarly, at the end of each episode in a motion picture, the dramatist will do well to consider the completeness, the sum-total of information then in the audience's mind. In reminding me of this truth one time, W. T. Price tapped a sheaf of my manuscript before him on a table and said, "You want that act as well graded as a street under a city ordinance."⁷

This same good friend used to tell me always to ask myself when considering a new turn in the action, "What of?" and "What if?" By that he meant, "What comes out of this in future action of the play; is it along the line I want to go?" and "What will be the effect on the situation as presented in preceding scenes, if this happens?" These two little ques-

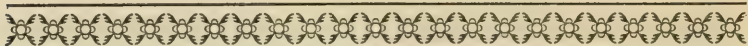
⁶ In another place Lilla considers what she shall do by conferring with a friend who is in a similar predicament, and so gives the audience a clear statement of the circumstances of her position, defining all the difficulties and her attitude toward them.

⁷ See Chapter XXXVI, "Inspection."

tions have stood me in wonderful stead, for they enable me to anticipate something of my audience's point of view when they will see my action for the first time. I just ask myself how much the spectators know at any given moment of the play; and the answer always tells me whether or not I have given sufficient information for comprehensibility of the action, as well as for definition of the characters and the degree of interest.

Summary of the situation has great value; but like any other working principle it must be used with discretion or it is worthless. Before dismissing the subject I want to give just two more instances of its use. In "The Woman in Room 13," a stage melodrama by Samuel Shipman and Max Marcin, it was used with great cleverness to "point up" the emotional reactions of the audience. I noticed it particularly in Act IV, the setting of which was the corridor of the Criminal Court. One of the characters, the "comedian" of the play, persisted, in the darkest hour of the action, in voicing his certainty that the man on trial for his life would be saved by the testimony of his wife. This is precisely what the audience wanted to believe. At the same time, if this prophecy was certain, there would be little or no further interest in the play, which was close to its end. So we were given a police captain, whose sole professional aim was conviction of the prisoner; and he as emphatically voiced his belief that nothing on earth could save the man on trial. Thus the hopes and fears of the audience were given expression. The optimism of the comedian was perfectly consistent with his character, and it was exceedingly helpful in keeping the audience buoyed up over what otherwise might have been a situation in which "the agony was piled on."

An even more striking illustration of this is in "The Riddle: Woman," when Lilla's friend solves her own, parallel problem by committing suicide. This fact has tremendous dramatic force in proving the desperateness of Lilla's position.



CHAPTER XV

CONTINUOUS ACTION

THE sequence of continuous action is properly broken at the end of the statement it is designed to present because its statement then is complete, the same reason the chapter of a book is ended. To run two consecutive steps of action in the same continuous sequence is to neutralize them, while it then becomes difficult for the spectators to assign subordinate facts to the respective steps to which they belong. It also tends to bring about an anti-climactic state of affairs.

COMPLETE ACTION

WHEN I have succeeded in convincing a brother-dramatist of the importance of continuing the action from the beginning of the episode, or step, to its close, he usually endeavors to prove his conversion by making his whole action as continuous as possible. This is a mistake. My insistence is not on long-sustained action, but on *complete* action. The sequence should be just one full step forward of the whole story along the main line of interest. Before the sequence is ended, let the incident it presents be culminated. The sequence may be half an hour long, or longer. Or it may be ten seconds in duration, or shorter. There is nothing arbitrary about the length of sequences of continuous action.

The gap between sequences, chapters, or acts, may have no more value than a comma or a semicolon in a sentence, or it may be useful only as a short breathing-space in which the

spectators withdraw temporarily from the action to rest from their emotional exertion and to recapitulate what they have seen; but primarily it serves to mark the completion of a pregnant, dramatic statement. Of course, the dramatist endeavors, so far as possible, to make actual lapses of time in his story coincide with the structural gaps.

In the so-called regular theater the effort to make the entire play action continuous is time-worn. The heresy goes back at least to the birth of the alleged "unity of time," which is to say the "rule" that a play should not deal with events taking longer to transpire than the actual time of representation. Charles Rann Kennedy's "The Servant in the House" really has no lapses of time. The curtain descends on an act and rises on the next with the characters in the identical positions in which they were left. The same is true of "The New Sin," by B. MacDonald Hastings. Strindberg thought he had a real artistic principle in continuous action. You may read about it in his preface to his play, "The Countess Julie," where he reiterates his hope for "a public educated to a point where it can sit through a whole-evening performance in a single act."

For my part I prefer to listen to George Broadhurst's view of the case. "The manipulation of the curtain has been honored with a good deal of critical attention from time to time," he told Chauncey L. Parsons several years ago.¹ "I am fully convinced that the length of an act need never be considered. You must simply bear in mind that as long as the curtain stays up, the audience must remain interested in what you have to show them, and when it goes down you must make them feel anxious to see what is going to occur as soon as it rises again. Of course, it may be difficult to make a very short act significant, or a very long one consistently entertaining, but an act should not be written on a time allowance. Let the audience recognize that the pictured events are true to life—or to the world which you create behind the footlights—and they are little concerned by the time that is consumed in the narration."

¹ Interview in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, August 28, 1912.

CUT-AND-FLASH

THE importance of making the act continuous may be accepted, I think, although an attempt to observe it must result in some practical difficulties. Chief among these is the likelihood that in order to keep the action going from one interesting detail to another there will be many trivial, uninteresting scenes. "Much better to break off the story when there's nothing of interest to tell," some one will say, "than to force matters with a lot of trash just to keep the action going," which would be quite justifiable if that was all to be considered.

There is another big reason for keeping action continuous that I will state in a later section;² but for the present let us confine ourselves to the need of grouping the related facts of the chapter. The objection that continuity of action means the inclusion of piffling material may be met by a demonstration that it does not. So soon as the immediate action becomes dull, or rather, just before it becomes dull, the main action is cut. This leaves a gap in the main action until the story becomes interesting again; but this gap is filled by material from some subordinate theme, keeping up the attention and obviating the necessity of using the curtain save at beginning and end of the act.

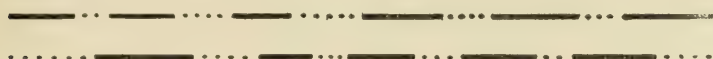
This phase of dramatic method has been developed in motion picture technique as one of its most important principles, largely because of the ease with which a film may be cut and the scenes transposed. Because "cut-and-flash," as it is called, has been so far perfected by screen writers, directors, and editors, the stage is indebted to them for the best illustrations of the device.

To make the matter of cut-and-flash a bit more graphic I may resort to a diagram. If the facts of my main line of interest are placed in a straight line, I will find certain portions of that line made up of wearisome details that I should like to omit. Leaving them out, my line would be broken, something like this:



² Chapter XVI, "The Literature of Power."

Obviously, my action could not be continuous with those gaps. To bridge them I would seek some active material in my lesser line of interest. There always is a lesser line, as you know from the fact that there is an issue of two opposing elements, of which the sympathetic side commonly constitutes the story proper. But upon placing my lesser line of interest in juxtaposition with my major thread, I am dismayed to find the interesting portions of the former do not fit into the gaps of the latter:



Some tailoring is necessary. And remembering what has been said about the lesser line of interest, or unsympathetic side, existing only for the purpose of making the major line interesting, I do virtually all the trimming on the subordinate theme until it does fit:



You have seen the manner in which alternate acts of sympathetic and unsympathetic sides dovetail for the forward movement of proposition and plot; now you are asked merely to see how they combine in the forward movement of each sequence, or individual step of plot. It's the same familiar principle working on a smaller scale.

Cut-and-flash is one of the most useful devices in motion picture craftsmanship. Continuity writers ordinarily regard it merely as a means of filling in awkward lapses of time. Thus, Saunders Van Tootle visits a gambling house for the technical purpose of squandering the remnant of his fortune. It would be tiresome to watch him from the first turn of the wheel to the last, so the continuity man decides to show just the first turn and the last, "cutting" the scene of the gambling house after the first turn of the wheel, "flashing" a scene of Van Tootle's patient wife at home darning socks and rocking the cradle, and then coming back to the gambling house for the wastrel's ruin. This is all very useful so far as it goes; but cut-and-flash has other values.

One of the other uses to which it may be put is to stimulate

the suspense by showing some advance made by the opposing line of interest, thereby bringing the contestants "neck-and-neck" again, so to speak. Of course, this trick is employed many times in a crude fashion; but that does not invalidate the method. The guiding principle is to "cut" the main line of interest and to "flash" the lesser. In other words, just enough of the lesser is interpolated to strengthen and enrich the greater.³ If the continuity writer will arrange his main line of interest in a column, just as he did in working out his plot, and then add parts of his lesser line at those places where strengthening is necessary, he cannot go far astray in point of structure; and he has provided automatically a highly efficient emotional instrument, because the line of interest is then single and continuous.

FINDING "FLASH" MATERIAL

JUST how does one find flash material? Well, primarily, one may "invent" it to meet a given need. If you know why you need a flashed scene at this particular point, and what you want to accomplish with it, it isn't very difficult to think of something to fit. "Parallel action" is an expression that is very common in the studios and fairly well understood. The simplest story invariably has many associated ideas woven into it; and to develop any one of these is to uncover a wealth of flash material. Another suggestive method is to ask yourself what other characters of the play, who are not now figuring in the immediate action, may be doing at the present time. Mrs. Brown is complaining to Mrs. Jones that Johnny Jones broke a pane of glass in her house. Where is Johnny now? A line of questioning that might, in a motion picture, cause you to invent the telling flash action in which Mr. Jones is seen, almost simultaneously with Mrs. Brown's complaint, thrashing Johnny in the woodshed. And if you haven't Johnny to think of, review your entire *dramatis personæ* and consider what *they* may be doing at that

³ The stage director as well as the stage playwright, treats all connective scenes with greatest possible economy but builds all "big" scenes for maximum strength. See my "Play Production in America," p. 62.

juncture until you find one bit that answers your purpose.

As a matter of fact, if your play subject is rich enough in associated ideas to warrant consideration in the theater at all, you are bound to have plenty of flash material without troubling to look about for it.

TRANSITION FROM IDEA TO IDEA

THE only real continuity is continuity of thought.⁴ Varying locations of the successive scenes have nothing to do with it. The effectiveness of cut-and-flash lies most in the close identity of subject matter in the cut and the flashed scenes. That in stage plays scenes are pretty much in the same place, and that in motion pictures they are in many varied localities is no fundamental difference so far as the method of the two mediums is concerned. Says William James: "We may think about our topic mainly in words, or we may think about it mainly in visual or other images, but this need make no difference as regards the furtherance of our knowledge of the topic. If we only feel in the terms, whatever they may be, a fringe of affinity with each other and with the topic, and if we are conscious of approaching a conclusion, we feel that our thought is rational and right."⁵ In other words "the stream of consciousness" on the part of the audience calls only for a relationship of successive ideas.

In "Les Miserables," Fantine, the devoted mother, remarks to the benevolent Jean Valjean, "Only this morning I was looking at the dust on the mantelpiece and I thought of Cosette;" and as the reader considers this there is no incongruity about it, because Fantine's thoughts are altogether of Cosette, and anything at all would serve to remind her of the child. Therefore, once again, so long as thoughts are related, we may juxtapose most unrelated objects in successive scenes. William James has pointed out elsewhere in his work just quoted, that we may remember a line of connected thoughts

⁴ The word "continuity" is not borrowed from motion picture work, although it is commonly used there. Dryden spoke of "continuity (or *liaison des scènes*)" in "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" long before motion pictures, as we know them, were invented.

⁵ "Psychology," p. 168.

much easier than we may recall a line of gibberish. I believe that he is the author who provided the combination of unrelated French words, "Pas de lieu Rhône que nous," that probably could not be remembered without great effort unless one knew the unifying idea that when you pronounce the chain of words, you really are saying, "Paddle your own canoe." Having that key, I remember the jumble of words clearly although perhaps fifteen years have passed since I read it.⁶

The principle of cut-and-flash is a principle of the human mind itself. A person's brain is always cutting and flashing ideas, one suggesting and strengthening the other. It annihilates time and distance just as they say motion pictures do; and in this operation it moves instantaneously from subject to subject, again as they say the pictures do. "The mind," says the ancient proverb, "than which nothing is swifter."⁷

Cut-and-flash is the normal, healthy mental process, not a demoralization. I recall that when I read a continuity at Yale, for a motion picture project involving the University, some of the assembled professors remarked their fear that in any motion picture intended for classroom use the constant shifting of scenes on the screen would prove demoralizing to children's minds, a fear that is fully justified by the usual motion picture craftsmanship where there is little continuity of thought; but when there is smooth transition from scene to scene in the manner stated, no educational instrument could be more ideal.

John Barrymore discussed this point one night in his dressing-room with Brock Pemberton.⁸ "In the pictures,"

⁶ See also the actor Quin's celebrated "Incoherent Story," which is given here in Chapter XXXII.

⁷ *Mens quâ nihil est celerius.* George Farquhar says in his "Discourse Upon Comedy" (reprinted in W. H. Durham's "Critical Essays of the 18th Century"), "If the stage cannot subsist without the strength of supposition and force of fancy in an audience, why should a poet fetter the business of his plot and starve his action for the nicety of an hour or the change of a scene; since the thought of man can fly over a thousand years with the same ease, and in the same instant of time, that your eye glances from six to seven on the dial-plate; and can glide from the Cape of Good Hope to the Bay of St. Nicholas, which is quite across the world, with the same quickness and activity as between Covent Garden Church and Will's Coffee-House."

⁸ Pemberton was at that time general manager for Arthur Hopkins under whose management Barrymore was appearing in person on the stage.

said Barrymore in substance, explaining the usual practice, "I will be shown about to strike the villain. My hand will start to come down on his head. They interpolate a scene of something I was thinking about yesterday. I bring my hand down a bit further. They show my old mother waiting for me at the fireside at home. Then, perhaps, I finish the blow." The irony of the distinguished actor was not unwarranted. Cut-and-flash is at once one of the best-used and most abused devices in playmaking.

SUBORDINATING "FLASHED" SCENES

It is highly important to remember that the flashed scene is always, for the moment, the subordinate line of interest. Neglect of this is the great pitfall into which so many directors slip. For years it has been the practice of most of these gentlemen to consider a play manuscript as a mere starting-point for production, to be altered at will, but with any promising points to be developed to the absolute limit. That is, a required quarrel scene may be amplified, during the rehearsal period, into a fight scene; or if there is a crowd of onlookers prescribed, some of these may be worked up into individual "comedy" contributions.

This amplification is all very valuable in affording more material for cutting the finished play to length; but it leads the master mind to forget very easily the relative unimportance of flash material. When the director is "on set" staging flash action, it naturally fills his whole comprehension at that moment; it is for the time all-important to him, and he cannot well regain his perspective without reference to the manuscript.⁹ If a flashed scene is developed into a compelling bit of action it will distract the spectator's attention from its rightful object.

The importance of thinking of the flashed scene as purely subordinate action is apparent in the disappearing film

⁹ It still is considered good form by some directors to work without a manuscript at all. The idea seems to be that for a man to consult a continuity is a confession of ignorance of his story. The continuity is written in the first place, of course; but this kind of director puts it aside immediately after reading it.

"chase"—that part of the plot, in virtually every feature photoplay in the old days, where the characters joined in a supposedly thrilling race to some great goal, the irate father hurrying to reach the minister's before the eloping couple, or the heroine with the governor's pardon flying in an automobile to the rescue of her lover who is sentenced to die in the next second or two, while the villain speeds along the same stretch of country in the fast mail. They still have their chases, and much after the old formula; but now they consider one of the parties the major line of interest and flash the other.

The old method was to show only flashes on both sides; and it persisted until some one discovered that "flashing against flashes" really lessens the action instead of speeding it up. It's just "marking time." Flashes never should follow one another immediately; they should be used only in conjunction with solid plot incidents. Flashes should not be long sustained in time on the screen, nor should they contain elaborate bids for attention unless the aroused curiosity of the audience is to be gratified soon after by a longer view. For instance, it would be virtually impossible to make flashed action out of two passenger trains rushing to a head-on collision. To sustain any other line of interest above that would seem out of the question. In the Wallace Reid picture, "Across the Continent," which is a convenient up-to-date "chase," there is a main line of interest which carries the story of the coast-to-coast race with the hero in a flivver, continuously forward, the other elements being reduced mostly to flashes. I say that this story has a forward movement, and so it has—although there are dreary spots in it that made me very thankful that across the continent is only three, not ten, thousand miles.

THE SPECTATOR'S SENSE OF TIME

THERE is just one more large consideration of cut-and-flash to which your attention must be called. It is the extent to which flashes may fill time lapses in the major action. I first

encountered this problem when I was writing a court scene in a continuity for Frank Woods several years ago. My major line of interest was in the court-room, and so was the flash material. Mr. Woods insisted that my flash material should be of scenes outside the court. I didn't understand his point then, but I did later. Incidents that occur simultaneously (or nearly so) in the same place, where all the characters are interested in the same event, in the same place, fill periods of time almost exactly as long as they actually are. Events that happen in different places, with different particular interests, have respective time values in proportion to the difficulty the audience has in transferring attention to them. If the effort of attention is great, the scene, however brief it actually may be, will suggest a fairly long time lapse; if the effort is slight a scene of precisely the same actual length will convey an idea of a brief interval. A scene that may be exhausted of its interest almost immediately, as a view of a typist at her machine, or a shoemaker at his last without change of position, drags at once—and the impression of time consequently is longer.¹⁰

The sense of time, in the human mind, is not a matter that may be measured by clocks or watches. James has an admirable chapter on it in his "Psychology;" and I may quote from that two sentences summarizing what I am trying to state: "In general, a time filled with varied and interesting experiences seems short in passing, but long as we look back. On the other hand, a tract of time empty of experiences seems long in passing, but in retrospect short." In flashes we are considering present time only; so an active scene—a flash of the prisoner in the court-room while the star witness, the main line of interest, is delivering his testimony—will seem short, and a passive scene—passive in the sense of having no development of interest, as the racing automobile merely passing by—will seem long.

I want you to draw one incidental conclusion from the

¹⁰ Discussing this phenomenon with Myron Stearns, he made the interesting observation that the time value of flashes intelligently used frequently is the square of the actual flash time.

directly foregoing remarks; and that is that by judicious handling of cut-and-flash material on the basis of its richness of interest or its barrenness, you may pack into very limited space a wide variety of convincing action. Also, the device removes all possible excuse for having in a play a single second of uninteresting action.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LITERATURE OF POWER

FOREGOING reasons might well be sufficient for making the action within the act continuous; but there is one other that removes all doubt. Continuous action takes the spectator out of himself and makes him participate directly in the play. The power of aroused and sustained emotion has been discussed in earlier pages; but here we have a specific application of the principle.

Thomas de Quincey separated what he called "the literature of knowledge and the literature of power," the function of first being to teach, and that of the other to move. He said that the meanest of authors who *moves* is greatly superior to those who merely *teach*, that the literature of knowledge must die by mere advance of knowledge, while the literature of power is "triumphant forever as long as the language exists in which it speaks."¹ However that may be, the power to stir emotion is one of the greatest functions of the drama; and it lies in the main in continuous action.

WEAKNESS OF DETACHED INCIDENTS

I HAVE tried conscientiously to justify the usual succession of detached incidents; but I must conclude that the device is disruptive of interest. Telling the facts of the story is only part of the work; they must also be told in connected action. Smooth continuity approximates fluidity of human thought and emotion, and so stimulates both. Mere receptiveness of the audience is not enough; the mind of the spectator must be made to react. "Whilst part of what we perceive comes

¹ "Biographical Essays."

through our senses from the object before us," says William James in his "Psychology," "another part (and it may be the larger part) always comes out of our own mind."

"The more deeply a spectator feels, the more genuine his pleasure," is the statement of Beaumarchais in this connection;² and Schiller says, somewhat more pertinently here, "A series of several connected incidents is required to produce in our souls a succession of different movements which arrest the attention, which, appealing to all the faculties of our minds, enliven our instinct of activity when it is exhausted, and which, by delaying the satisfaction of this instinct, do not kindle it the less."³ Corneille, in his "Premier Discours," recommended a constant action in a play, calling it the *liaison des scènes*, a term which Dryden noted with approval while he explained it thus: "The stage is so supplied with persons that it is never empty all the time: he who enters second, has business with him who went on before; and before the second quits the stage, a third appears who has business with him."⁴ In Spain, Lope de Vega already had made substantially the same observation: "Very seldom should the stage remain without some one speaking, because the crowd becomes restless in these intervals and the story spins itself out at great length; for, besides its being a great defect, the avoidance of it increases grace and artifice."⁵ But the *liaison des scènes* may be interpreted to mean much more, namely, the smooth transition from idea to idea that has been called in these pages continuity of thought.

FORCE OF AROUSED EMOTION

DE QUINCEY's assignment of paramount importance to the literature of power must depend greatly upon the use to which that literature is put, because when emotions are stirred in the theater one's reasoning powers are of little service. A vicious writer, having worked us up to the unreasoning pitch,

² "Essay on the Serious Drama." Translated by Barrett H. Clark in his "European Theories of the Drama."

³ Clark, "European Theories of the Drama."

⁴ "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy."

⁵ "The New Art of Writing Plays in This Age."

might swing us into excesses from which we would shrink with horror in a calmer frame of mind, just as easily as the revivalist, climbing on the awakened religious fervor of his congregation, brings people to an hysterical acceptance of his creed. The man who uses this power rightly is a benefactor to the race, while he who perverts it may become its greatest curse.

The cumulative force of sustained appeal should not be broken. When the agitator's eloquence is permitted to go cold, his listeners have time to consider for themselves and the effort is lost. I often have noticed intelligent audiences at motion picture theaters when episodes of "serials" were being shown. At first skeptical, giving a half-amused, half-contemptuous attention, they gradually became hypnotized by the primitive swing of the impossible thing until they sat fairly on the edge of their seats with raw suspense thrilling them to the backbone. Then suddenly, at the height of it, the picture would be succeeded by the legend, "Continued next week," and every mother's son and daughter, still gasping and choking with the given emotion, would laugh embarrassedly and pretend they didn't like it. They had this shamefaced feeling because "serial" action has no other real purpose than to produce sensation; essentially it is as devoid of uplift as a roller-coaster or a Ferris-wheel. Yet it really is not wholly to be decried because, like the coaster and the wheel, it purges the emotions, causing the over-strained twentieth-century body to relax. I know that I enjoy a good serial as much as any urchin on the East Side.

It takes time to think critically, and a rush of emotion affords none for reflection. Goethe states it very clearly: "The contemplative listener is in reason bound to remain in a state of constant sensuous exertion; he must not pause to meditate, but must follow in a state of passionate eagerness; his fancy is entirely put to silence; no claims may be made upon it."⁶ Stephen F. Austin, in his suggestive "Principles of Drama-Therapy" (New York, 1917), says: "It is, moreover, just the fact that an audience during a performance is in a slight hypnotic condition that accounts for the standing

⁶ "Conversations."

criticism lodged by the producer against the public: 'An audience,' he says, 'will not think!' As a matter of fact in that condition the audience cannot think, for to start a train of conscious thought implies an act of origination, and this is prohibited as long as demands are made upon the attention. The spectator, therefore, like the hypnotized subject, is by the very terms of his condition, incapable of thought: all he can do is to receive and respond to impressions." (P. 37f.)

This condition certainly is strengthened by the fact that the spectator is but one of a number in an audience. In a crowd a person's emotions are stirred far more easily than when he is alone, wherefore we speak commonly of the strong emotional reaction of an audience as the "mob spirit." On this score Davenport offers something useful in his "Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals:" "Psychology of crowds is strangely like primitive man. Stimulation immediately begets action. Reason is in abeyance.⁷ The volume of emotion, too, is increased by knowledge of its existence in a crowd. As in the case of the primitive mind, imagination has unlocked the flood-gates of emotion, which may become, upon occasion, wild enthusiasm or demoniac frenzy. The crowd, too, is easily acted upon by suggestion. Fear, primitive fear, emerges. As a consequence of these various strands of feeling, the crowd presents itself as the great driving force, so to speak, of impulsive social action. The Anglo-Saxon crowd is one thing; the Latin or Celtic crowd quite another."

THE ILLUSION OF THE THEATER

WE ARE disposed to spurn the devices by which serious emotion is stirred because the emotional display itself seems like human weakness; yet, paradoxically, we go to the theater to have our emotions evoked. So the dramatist need not scruple about resorting to those means. As I said once before, the theater is an emotional system, and we may as well accept

⁷ Paul Shorey, writing on "Aristophanes" in "The Warner Library" (University Ed.), speaks of the fact that in the torrent of that dramatist's fun even feeble jokes, that would not stand calm criticism, contribute to it.

that fact frankly. Lessing says, "The only unpardonable fault of a tragic poet is this, that he leave us cold; if he interests us he may do as he likes with the little mechanical rules."⁸ Because this is one aim of the dramatist, Goethe, according to the "Conversations," was indignant at the manner in which critics probed Shakespeare's work. He said, "Shakespeare, in writing his pieces, could hardly have thought that they would appear in print, so as to be told over, and compared with one another; he had rather the stage in view when he wrote; he regarded his play as a lively and moving scene, that would pass rapidly before the eyes and ears upon the stage, not as one that was to be held firmly, and carped at in detail. Hence, his only point was to be effective and significant for the moment."

What is said here applies to continuous action in the act, not continuous action throughout the play. To compel the unreasoning emotion of the audience from start to finish is to take an unfair advantage which the audience will resent. By taking the attention continuously only in steps, the dramatist gives the spectators time to confirm their emotional feeling with their reason, and so to make their response intelligent and with their full consent. The emotional satisfaction to be found in the theater is much greater with periods of rest than without them.

Out of the recognition of the importance of continuous action in drama come various "rules" about maintaining it. Chief among these is the mandate long ago expressed by Lessing in a review of Maffei's "Merope." One of the characters in this tragedy is made to exclaim, "What a wonderful event, more wonderful than was ever conceived of on a stage!" Which affords Lessing opportunity to say (after remarking that in the time of Merope there were no theaters): "Altogether, the lines quoted would not please me, even if they did not contain an anachronism. The tragedian should avoid everything that can remind the audience of their illusion, for, as soon as they are reminded thereof, the illusion is gone. It almost seems here as though Maffei sought to strengthen this illusion by assuming the idea of a theater outside the theater,

⁸ "Lessing's Prose Works." "Dramatic Notes," No. 16.

but the mere words 'stage' and 'invention' are so prejudicial to the matter that they carry us straight thither whence he would divert us. It is sooner permitted to the comic poet thus to place representation in opposition to representation; for to rouse our laughter does not require the same degree of illusion as to arouse our pity."⁹ Yet, how commonly in the theater one hears the double-meaning line, "This could have happened only in a play!"

The spell should not be broken. Brander Matthews, discussing "The Conventions of the Music Drama" in his "Principles of Playmaking," gives this particular principle a wide application. "The sound rule for any artist would seem to be," he says, "that, whatever his especial art, he should carefully avoid everything which tends to awaken in the spectators the consciousness that they are parties to a bargain."

EMOTION THAT RISES AND FALLS

DRYDEN provides the interesting qualification that the interest of the audience should not always be at its maximum. There is an ebb and flow of response that sometimes is weak merely that it may have room to grow. "Nothing is more frequent in a fanciful writer than to foil himself by not managing this strength," observes this critic. "In a poet, his inborn vehemence and force of spirit will only run him out of breath the sooner if it be not supported by the help of Art. The roar of passion, indeed, may please an audience, three parts of which are ignorant enough to think all is moving which is noise, and it may stretch the lungs of an ambitious actor who will die upon the spot for a thundering clap; but it will move no other passion than indignation and contempt for judicious men. Longinus, whom I have hitherto followed, continues thus: 'If the passions be artfully employed, the discourse becomes vehement and lofty: if otherwise, there is nothing more ridiculous than a great passion out of season:'"¹⁰ and to this purpose he animadverts severely upon Æschylus, who writ nothing in cold blood, but was

⁹ "Dramatic Notes," No. 42.

¹⁰ "On the Sublime."

always in a rapture and in fury with his audience; the inspiration was still upon him, he was ever tearing it upon the tripos; or (to run off as madly as he does from one similitude to another) he was always at high-flood of passion, even in the dead ebb and lowest water-mark of the scene. He who would raise the passion of a judicious audience, says a learned critic, must be sure to take his hearers along with him; if they be in a calm, 'tis in vain for him to be in a huff; he must move them by degrees, and kindle with 'em: otherwise he will be in danger of setting his own heap of stubble on fire, and of burning out by himself, without warming the company that stand about him."¹¹

So continuous action does not mean action always of the same intensity. It rises and falls. Nevertheless it is connected, as music is connected, by the thread of attention.

¹¹ Preface to "Troilus and Cressida."



PART SIX
SUSTAINED INTEREST

CHAPTER XVII

RETARDATION

CONTINUOUS action is the obvious means of carrying the emotional response of the audience from past to future; but its maximum force necessarily must be in the present moment because that is when the audience is closest to events. The spectator always judges the present; past and future are only considerations that bear upon the present for its interpretation. Also, action of the present moment is the element that makes the audience feel that what is transpiring before them is occurring for the first time.¹

Drama should ever be in the first person, present tense. This is so important that many playwrights contend that incidental action is all that matters. Certainly there are two ways of looking at it. One way to write plays is just to tell the story; the other is to contrive merely a framework for scenes interesting in themselves. But I would not call either the best, although I think that to have a succession of interesting scenes irrespective of story is far better than just to string facts together. The latter way produces a "spotty" plot, by which I mean one where there is dramatic action in patches throughout, but not along the line of a single, undivided interest. The best plan lies somewhere between. Interest is primarily in the present moment; but by the succession of present moments we may construct a grand impression of the whole. That view of the case has been supported by reasons in foregoing pages.

¹ See the close of Chapter III of the present work.

PROLONGING MOMENTARY PLEASURE

JUST now the intention is to consider ways and means to magnify the force of the present moment in drama. One of the first comments that W. T. Price made on my work when I was playwriting under his supervision was that, "A play is not interesting if its interest lies in story and not in the development of story," adding that, "Detail gives breadth to action; and in getting close to life, detail is inevitable," which is entirely true; "it's the little things that count." Our agonies, our joys are made up of the merest incidents of Now. The present moment is the most imperative thing in drama as it is in life.

The most mediocre actor realizes the force of this. Give him a part, however small, and he will start building it up, bit by bit, with an accretion of details of only incidental value, but all intended to convey the pleasure acknowledged by the audience with applause. The best-loved characters of all time in the theater have been developed in just that way. The ancient and perennial figures of the harlequinade, that run back far B. C., are fabrics erected by many loving hands; Lord Dundreary, Tony Lumpkin, Dogberry, Colonel Sellers, Joshua Whitcomb, Bill Jones of "Lightnin'" and a whole gallery of others thus have been rounded into truer life as time has passed.

This fact is peculiarly impressed upon me because for a number of seasons I compared performances of new plays on Broadway with renditions of the same pieces by "Number 1" road companies performing at theaters on the outskirts of New York, and in most cases found more enjoyment in the road productions because, when that period had been reached, almost every ounce of acting value had been extracted by the players. I recall particularly a performance of Edgar Selwyn's "The Country Boy." The boarding-house parlor scene was unusually conducive to this sort of elaboration; and the result certainly was good, wholesome fun. One bit of business not in the original production was for most of the boarders to line up and make a low bow as the cold bottle of beer was being carried upstairs from the locked ice-box to the

landlady's favorite. This was not essential to the play; but it was true to life, and it contributed to the emotion for exercise of which the great public came to the theater.²

I am highly in favor of elaboration of the action in this way provided only that it does not distort truth or the proportions of the play as a whole. There lies the great danger. Conceive once more the havoc that may be wrought by amplification of scenes belonging to the subordinate side of the action.

To prolong pleasurable effect is not only legitimate, but admirable. Bringing us to the principle of Retardation. To hold the interest in a single fact till all value is exhausted from it is expert craftsmanship. The pleasure of the theater goes all too soon in any case, so let us detain it while we may. We tease the audience; we withhold little surprises for its delight; in short, we do everything to intrigue them until our stock of this particular article is depleted. Goethe told Eckermann that an example of this in Molière's "La malade imaginaire" was to his mind "the symbol of a perfect knowledge of the boards." He continued: "I mean the scene where the 'malade imaginaire' asks his little daughter Louison, if there has not been a young man in the chamber of her eldest sister. Now, any other who did not understand his craft so well would have let the little Louison plainly tell the fact at once, and there would have been an end of the matter. But what various motives for delay are introduced by Molière into this examination for the sake of life and effect. He first makes the little Louison act as if she did not understand her father; then she denies that she knows anything; then, threatened with the rod, she falls down as if dead; then, when her father bursts out in despair, she springs up from her feigned swoon with roguish hilarity, and at last, little by little, she confesses all. My explanation can only give you a very meager notion of the animation of the scene; but read the scene yourself till you become thoroughly impressed with its theatrical worth, and you will confess that there is more

² "The poet should not neglect those appeals to the senses which, although not among the essentials, are the concomitants of poetry."—Aristotle, "Poetics." I may add, for those who object to beer as a source of comic effect, that this incident occurred before Prohibition.

2/ 9. *no there* *Lovely Lady Act III - Scene 1st (Abandoned Mrs.)*

Stanley
(confessing all)
at prep.
~~Even when I was one of the big fellows in the lower form at school, I always sort of fell for the little kids in the lower form who cried and got home-sick for their families.~~ *them and all that - why even there, I liked 'em for it. Honestly said.*

~~Of course I laughed at 'em, like the rest of the fellows, but I used to sneak around when none of my crowd was watching and jolly up the poor little queers.~~ *And even when I got old, I could hardly keep from kicking some of those wide guys at college, the sophisticated kinds, who patronized the old men at home, keeping their bells.*

Stephanie
~~Just like you, Stanley.~~ *Lydia.* *I don't blame you for loving your mother. I do too. (She adds with pride)* *in the sophomore class*

I let me call her "Lydia."
She said I could.

Stanley
full for you when you were two days old that was before I knew you very well.
And she always was keen about you. She always had an idea ... Well, you know how mothers are.

Stephanie
Poor Lydia. She worries so about you,
Stanley

Stanley
She
~~Just like you, Stanley.~~ *She's at home there now, worrying about me, and never dreaming that father, her own husband*
when I left that house without even waiting for dinner, she almost reproached me. It has nearly killed me. Especially, she's lost her faith in belief in me. She thinks I've gone to the devil.

Stephanie
They weren't brought up right.
Well you see, these old people don't understand life. They aren't brought up right. They know nothing about repressions or sex psychology.

Stanley
She is so sweet and ignorant of the world. She doesn't know how to take care of herself. She never did. She's so guileless and innocent. She thinks I left the house without even waiting for dinner because I wanted to go to the devil.

I ran away from her without anything to say and good bye. I couldn't have gone through with it, if she had.
How Lydia, she loves you so
Not so
No, she doesn't *she's reproached me.* *She thinks I had to turn, and go to the house*

I merely wanted to go on the loose. My own mother is studying that of me!

Courtesy of the Author

FROM "LOVELY LADY" BY JESSE LYNCH WILLIAMS

"I have nothing to say about my 'individual habit of work' on plays because I no longer work on them," writes Mr. Williams, "having sworn off forever even before I had a temporary relapse in the case of this latest and last piece. In general I would say that fiction should be written sitting down, and plays standing up. In fact, plays should be written out loud. Some of my friends have two desks, one to sit down and write fiction on, and the other to 'cross over' to while composing scenes. As all of my plays have been dramatizations of my fiction, I have had considerable experience at both sitting down and standing up. I like sitting down better."

practical instruction contained in it than in all the theories in the world."³

Better plays are full of examples of this sort. I think at once of Shakespeare and Sheridan, who were past masters at retardation. Take the ring episode, involving Launcelot Gobbo and his father who does not recognize him until the end, in "The Merchant of Venice," as a random illustration; and for another, see how Fag and Absolute in "The Rivals" fix upon the lie, the "precise lie," with which they are to excuse their presence to old Sir Anthony. The scenes between Captain Absolute and his father are perhaps as clear demonstrations of the manner in which much action may be developed from little as any I can recall. The absolutely necessary facts might be told in a dozen crisp speeches; yet every word used pays for itself. Even in Ibsen, where everything is done with the greatest economy, retardation is a vital principle.

Retardation has more than one benefit. It fills the necessary acting time; it prolongs the interest until the subject of attention has yielded all of its value, and it also makes the story more plausible by giving it time to develop. There must be time for facts "to sink in." The machinery must be loosened up. The play in which everything is shaved and polished for only plot movement is invariably unsatisfactory because it is all cut-and-dried. The dovetailing should be done with reference to the emotion of the play, not just to story. When a dramatist first becomes impressed with the importance of play structure, he has a tendency to condense events too much, leading to an unreal rapidity of action. At this juncture he must learn over again to leaven fiction with truth, because human nature and events take time to expand—not necessarily literal time, but the audience must receive the *sense* of time.

Probably there never was an actor who understood the value of retardation better than the beloved Joseph Jefferson. His intensely amusing delays in the rôle of Bob Acres were much of the later life of that character in his repertoire. The newer Bob Acres bargained for thirty-nine paces if Sir

³"Conversations."

Lucius O'Trigger would not consent to forty or thirty-eight; he began to swagger in laughable contrast with his earlier terror when he learned that the hour for the duel was past, and there were many other developments of emotion that cannot survive Jefferson because they belonged to his own genius.⁴ Another artist whose retardation of scenes in acting will repay study, is Francis Wilson. The delightfulness of his comedy, "The Bachelor's Baby," is almost wholly in retardation, the plot being both slender and trite.

POWER IN DELAY

RETARDATION always should add something to the play action proper. Just to pile up details is likely to smother the action. "You must at once reason and illustrate," said Longinus in "On the Sublime." This thought doubtless was in the mind of T. Wigney Percival, one of the authors of "Grumpy," when he told an interviewer: ⁵ "The quality of a play which above all brings success is action. Not bustling on and off the stage, mind you, but forward-moving action that is part of the story and the main idea. Is it not amazing how even experienced dramatists will forget this? How they will write pages on pages of exposition and narrative, trusting to scenery or some other extraneous thing to carry them along? A play is action; something must take place on the stage before the audience. There must be a fight; in high comedy, of course, it will be a battle of wits or a conflict between one temperament and another. But action of some kind there must be. 'Is anything happening, taking place, or am I just telling about something?' Those are healthy questions for the young playwright to keep asking himself as he writes his play."

⁴ Jefferson not only developed and refined the part of Acres, he increased the force of the entire play. His acting version of "The Rivals" is one of the treasured manuscripts of the theater. A brief account of some of the changes he wrought in this comedy is given by W. T. Price in his "Technique of the Drama" (New York, 1892). When George Henry Nettleton edited "The Major Dramas of Sheridan" for the "Athæneum Press Series" (Boston, 1906), Jefferson sent him a copy of this work by Mr. Price, saying, "I do not know Mr. Price, but he seems to have not only found out what I did, but why I did it."

⁵ New York Press, Jan. 28, 1914.

Facts should be provided so that each new one added changes the character of the whole. Thus, to add sugar to water to lemon gives us lemonade, which as James explains, provides not the taste of water plus sugar plus lemon, but an entirely new taste made up of the blend. It was because Maffei merely added superfluous facts to his verses in "Merope" that Lessing found the following fault with him: "It is very proper that Ægisthus should describe minutely his struggle with the robber whom he murders, for on this rests his defense; but that when he confesses to have thrown the corpse into the river, he should paint the minutest phenomena that accompany the fall of a heavy body into water, how it shoots down, with what sound the water divides, how it splashes up into the air, and how the flood closes up again, this would not be forgiven even to a cold garrulous lawyer who defends him, much less to himself. Whoever stands before a judge to defend his life has far other things near his heart than to be so childishly accurate in his narrative."⁶

In Goethe's "Conversations," March 11, 1831, the great man finds a similar fault in a novel by his contemporary, Sir Walter Scott: "In 'Ivanhoe' they are seated at a table in a castle hall at night, and a stranger enters. Now, he is quite right in describing the stranger's appearance and dress, but it is a fault that he goes to the length of describing his feet, shoes and stockings. When we sit down in the evening, and some one comes in, we see only the upper part of his body. If I describe the feet, daylight enters at once and the scene loses its nocturnal character."

Observe how the retardation in this next illustration develops the situation itself. In a Vitagraph serial motion picture starring Antonio Moreno, the Colonel and his men at last have come into possession of the priceless jewels that the Colonel wants to take back to his ranch. The Colonel knows that certain men are planning to rob him at the first opportunity, so he decides to use two cases, in one of which the jewels will be carried, and the other containing nothing. The former will be carried by Moreno in a high-powered

⁶ "Dramatic Notes," No. 42.

automobile, while the latter, the empty one, will be transported on the train by the Colonel himself. While they are planning this, one of the conspirators listens through the transom over the hall door; and he now escapes without being discovered. It looks as though instead of the conspirators following the Colonel with the decoy, Moreno will be caught with the jewels. Moreno opens the door to go out, but presently returns. As his hand touches the outside knob he finds mud on it. His suspicions are aroused. He considers how it might have come there, and then tests out a plausible hypothesis by stepping on the knob himself to look over the transom. He realizes that their plans have been discovered. Whereupon they determine to outwit the conspirators by leaving earlier than they had expected in the morning, incidentally, as appears in the following episode, with Moreno carrying the empty case instead of the full one. Neither side of the issue is one whit further ahead than when the story started; yet there has been action every minute.

THE QUICK-THINKING AUDIENCE

ONE other great danger in retardation is that the dramatist may suddenly find himself going slower than his audience. The spectator not only is, but should be, the quickest thinker on the scene. The moment the disappointed man is confronted with a bottle of whisky, the spectator sees in his mind's eye the human wreck of a few scenes hence, lying in a gutter or being kicked out of the eternal dance-hall; the moment the virtuous girl meets the noble, handsome man, the audience scents the orange-blossoms and hears, however distantly, the glad peal of wedding-bells. These anticipations detract from immediate interest and make the spectator impatient to proceed. They should not be permitted to arise.

The progress of interest from cause to effect is so natural that, when a dramatist presents the merest symptoms of his purpose, the audience will jump at conclusions. The theater-wise audience always expects the symmetrical in a play plot. Spectators always are looking toward rounded-out events.

So much so that human nature is always attaching significance where none exists. Take this proverb:

See a pin and let it lie;
You'll need a pin before you die.

The audience is always "putting two and two together" to form judgments. Clever dramatists know this tendency and capitalize it by leading the audience to expect certain things, then surprising them by entirely different conclusions.⁷ Many instances of this plot-building device are cited by Carolyn Wells in her useful and entertaining book, "The Technique of the Mystery Story."⁸ But the tendency is more frequently misused. When William S. Hart, as Evans, the factory foreman, in "The Whistle," warns the owner of the plant about the danger from unprotected machinery, the audience knows at once, from the great deliberateness and emphasis of the warning, that before long somebody is going to be caught in it; and when the accident does occur, it is to all intents and purposes stale stuff.

The audience must not be permitted to take "short-cuts" through the plot. To prevent this is just as much of an obligation to the dramatist as to stimulate interest in the proper direction. It is no less an obligation for the director. In "Wild Honey," Priscilla Dean, as the Lady Vivienne who has strayed far from the rest station across the South African veld to photograph a rabbit and so becomes lost, cannot be a really convincing figure because the travelers at the rest station who miss her and look about for her, do not exhaust the logical means of finding her. The country is almost as flat as the proverbial table-top; yet nobody thinks of climbing to the roof of the horse-drawn stage or atop the rest station itself, to look for her. The tacit acceptance by the hero and his companions of the fact that she *is* lost, precludes all possibility of doubt on that score, and makes their mild efforts, which were designed primarily to fill in the time for Lady Vivienne to go farther away, wholly ineffective. A

⁷ William Harris, Jr., has remarked to me more than once how much importance he attaches to this in plays he produces.

⁸ Springfield, Mass., 1913.


little doubt as to whether she was lost or not, until a fresh story element might have been introduced, would have strengthened the incident immeasurably.

Retardation is highly effective in playmaking; but like all other principles of the art, it must be used with discrimination.



CHAPTER XVIII

COMPACTNESS

 **I**N LINING-UP the steps, or sequences of continuous action, in a play, the point of the whole story is borne in mind and the steps are made to achieve it. Those that contribute nothing to the main point are discarded.

SCALING

IN SKETCHING out the sequences in "The Gateway to the West,"¹ the main point was known from the major proposition, which was substantially as follows: England, needing the West for the expanding population of her Thirteen Colonies along the Atlantic seaboard and holding title to it by early claims, finds that the French are holding the West for themselves, and sends Washington with a letter requesting the French to remove; France, needing the West to connect her settlements in Louisiana with those in Canada, refuses to remove, and sends Jumonville to shut out the expanding English with force. Washington kills Jumonville, precipitating the issue. Will the English hold the gateway to the West, or will the French remain masters of the Ohio? This question is answered when the English become masters of the Ohio; and then—and not till then—the play must end. The steps to establish this complete story seemed at first to be these:

¹ I have been lavish in citing motion picture illustrations because they reveal more strikingly the great flexibility of thought in play-building. The stage dramatist uses the identical dramatic method, but he is obliged to restrict his thinking to an arbitrary place and usually to a more limited number of acts.

- I. French refuse to vacate Ohio.
- II. French attack Trent's Fort erected by English to protect rights to Ohio.
- III. It being Virginia's duty to protect its own frontier, Washington marches against the French under orders from Lieutenant-Governor Dinwiddie.
- IV. Washington kills Jumonville sent by French to drive him out.
- V. Washington is compelled by a larger French force sent against him to surrender at Fort Necessity.
- VI. English colonies decline union against the common enemy, so Dinwiddie secures aid directly from the King.
- VII. General Braddock, sent from England, is unable to march against the French at Fort Duquesne because of lack of transport, until Franklin provides it.
- VIII. Braddock's defeat.
- IX. England declares war on France, removing the burden of defense of the West from Virginia.
- X. The Canada-Louisiana line is cut by the capture of Fort Frontenac.
- XI. Depriving the French at Fort Duquesne of provisions, and compelling them to abandon the West to the advancing English.

But, quite obviously, this was far too much material. What could be cut? Well, roll III and IV together; combine VI and VIII; and probably IX and X might be rolled into one sequence, reducing the whole to eight steps:

- I. French refuse to vacate Ohio.
- II. French attack Trent's Fort.
- III. Washington kills Jumonville.
- IV. Washington surrenders Fort Necessity.
- V. Franklin enables Braddock to march.
- VI. Braddock's defeat.
- VII. Open war; capture of Frontenac.
- VIII. Compelling abandonment of Fort Duquesne to English.

Subsequent needs caused the elimination of the capture of Frontenac, and Franklin's work was permitted to remain only tentatively. This suffices to show the broad process of scaling, so I shall not go on into the further eliminations necessary to cut the material down to production length.

WHERE THE STORY GROWS

IN DETAIL, it is necessary to remark the dramatist's faculty for picking just those places in his story where the action is at its height. That is, how is it possible to run two or more steps together, condensing their action for greater force? There is a conspicuous example of what I mean in an historical play, "Columbus." On the Admiral's first voyage across the Sea of Darkness there was a near mutiny of the sailors which might easily have been an act in itself, before the discovery of land, which might be another act. There also were various minor events, spread over many days, such as the variation of the compass needle, flights of strange birds, curious objects found floating, and so forth. Especial considerations, mainly of dramatic effectiveness, required that all these circumstances be given in a single sequence of continuous action. I figured that the attempted mutiny and the landfall might be brought together by opening the sequence shortly before the landfall, so that the mutinous feeling, based on the fear of the boundlessness of the unknown sea, might be checked at its height by the discovery of the West Indies. At this period of the voyage Columbus had ceased to note in his log the fluctuation of the compass needle; but a little astronomical and other calculation demonstrated that the needle still must have been away from true north, while the floating carved stick and branch of berries were brought in by a developed incident in which Columbus used them to reassure a particularly discouraged sailor.

I must note in passing one of the "considerations of dramatic effectiveness" that made me desire to keep the attempted mutiny in "Columbus" in the same sequence with the landfall. Progressive action implies steady change of the situation. The attempted mutiny did not change it for Columbus himself, and it got the rebellious sailors nowhere because it never culminated. The change came with the landfall; that was what effectually destroyed the mutinous sentiment and gave us the revulsion of feeling in the sailors out of which was built the scene at the end of the sequence in question, where they fall to their knees and beg the Ad-

miral's pardon. Audiences like to study character. Change gives us characters in action—their emotions are evoked, demonstrate themselves, and are supplanted by others. What is more interesting in the characterization of a hard man than that time when you see him encounter an appeal that illumines his stony heart and works a transformation—proves his humanness? The braggart captain returning from the wars, proved to be a poltroon, and the narrow soul revealed in hypocrisy, have been favorites in the drama for centuries. The character who changes always is the most interesting to audiences.²

If the dramatist will bear in mind the purpose of his sequence, he will be able, with little difficulty, to lop off quantities of purely preparatory material. In "The Gateway to the West" the opening sequence is designed to show Legardeur Saint-Pierre, commandant at Fort le Bœuf, the principal French post on the Ohio, refusing to retire from the region at the request, through Colonel George Washington, of Lieutenant-Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia. The inexperienced writer almost certainly would begin by showing Dinwiddie giving instructions to Washington, Washington leaving Will's Creek with Christopher Gist as guide, his stop at Logstown and parleys there with Indians, his stop at Venango where a drunken French officer told him of the designs of his nation to hold the region, and Washington's continued trip to Fort le Bœuf with the friendly savage, Half-King, and the interpreter, Van Braam. All of this would be interesting, but it would be incidental for all that; so the dramatist who had fixed his eye on the main point, would sweep most of it out of his way as deadwood, or shape it for more immediate effect. By doing this he would clarify the main idea, making the history lesson stronger.

This explains what I mean when I tell a writer to grasp his situation closer to the hilt; it should be short handle and long blade, not long handle and short blade. The compact conception is always made easier when you assume that preparatory things *have* happened instead of that they are

² This matter is discussed in greater detail in the later chapters on Characterization.

happening now. Hence, soon after the opening of the first sequence of "The Gateway to the West," we see Washington and his companions already nearing Fort le Bœuf, while all the other attendant circumstances of the action are woven in close to that point.

ANNIHILATION OF SPACE

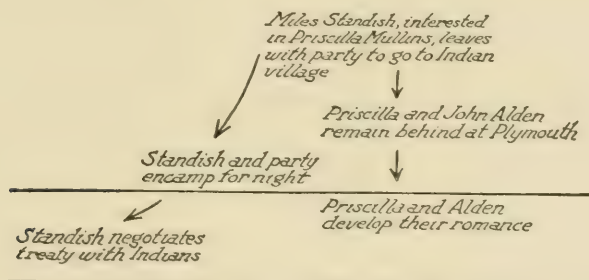
ONE great obstacle to this mode of thinking is that the writer persistently thinks of his characters, when their relationships are being established, *as being in the same spot.* They really may be in many different places so long as they are connected by the governing thought. If you want to register that Daniel Swank, the gambler, and T. Worthington Swank, pillar of the church, are brothers as mere preparation for their thrilling interview later, it is not necessary to show them together before that session. It will not help matters very much to explain and explain and explain how they were rocked in the same cradle, that they paddled in the same swimmin' hole, and were started off in life by Father Swank with nine dollars and eighty-two cents apiece—that is, not if it's all to make that one, aforesaid interview more dramatic.

The purpose of the material is the important thing; and all of it should be shaped toward that end. An expert dramatist does not waste time getting to the point; he brings in retardation only after he has reached his point to prolong the maximum interest that he has built up. They say that Scribe's recipe for success in the theater was "Get on with the story,"³ and whether the ascription to him is correct or not, the recommendation is excellent.

In one of the tentative, preliminary sketches of the historical motion picture known as "The Pilgrims," Miles Standish and several companions left Plymouth to negotiate a treaty with the Indians. They were shown going, stopping for the night on the journey, arriving at the redskin village, and leaving. The particular point to be established, the treaty itself, really required only the close of negotiations

³ See "Dramatic Construction" by Sydney Grundy in the *London Theatre*, April, 1881.

with the Indians and the immediate departure, all one sequence of continuous action. The following diagram may give you a clearer idea of the manner in which the important parts were lifted out:



The above diagram calls for a side explanation. The reader, recalling Longfellow's "The Courtship of Miles Standish," will wonder why no dramatic importance is attached to the rivalry of Standish and John Alden over Priscilla. History unfortunately provides no real basis for the poet's version; and the present material is from the records.

That Standish was at the Indian village and that Priscilla and John Alden were at Plymouth during the vital action does not affect the continuity of thought, on the part of the audience, any more than it would if Standish was around the corner of Priscilla's home while Alden was sparking within. Besides, the action of Priscilla and Alden at Plymouth, makes very good flash material to be cut into Standish's action with the Indians. I may add that much of the preparatory material that is shown cut off here really was saved and used in separate sequences to establish different main points.

DIVISION INTO ACTS

I HAVE said that the sequence of continuous action in a picture play corresponds with the act of continuous action in a stage play. You will find striking illustration of this by noticing in old theater programs how each act is summarized in a sensational line that really is the object for which that act was written. Reaching into my library at random I find "The Courier of Lyons," a drama first produced in 1850, dealing with the extraordinary situation of a respectable man

arrested for the crimes of a notorious brigand who closely resembled him. The program offers the successive chapters as follows: Act I, The Recognition—"Oh, horror! My son, my son!;" Act II, Lesurques arrested on a charge of willful murder; Act III, The Last Hope—the Penalty of Death!!! This was the usual form of presentation in those days.

Some forty or more years later the practice remained but had become refined. Clyde Fitch's "Beau Brummel" (1890), nevertheless had much of the old-time flavor:

THE FIRST ACT

First Scene: The morning toilet. Mr. Brummel dispatches a proposal of marriage, assists his nephew and sends for a new tailor.

Second Scene: The Beau receives a number of friends and makes an unfortunate blunder.

THE SECOND ACT

A small and early party at Carlton House. Mr. Brummel proposes to an heiress and reprimands a Prince.

THE THIRD ACT

The Mall and how it came about that Mr. Brummel had a previous engagement with His Majesty.

THE FOURTH ACT

First Scene: Mr. Brummel's lodgings in Calais.

Second Scene: The attic at Caen. A very poor dinner with an excellent dessert.

By 1906 the dramatists were becoming terser, preparatory to dropping the program résumé entirely. Bronson Howard in that year gave his program for "Kate" in this manner: Act I, When Marriage is a Farce; Act II, Love and Legal Documents; Act III, Stronger Than Law or Rite; Act IV, Which Would Be a Wife? But now that the custom virtually has disappeared from the theater, I am inclined to regret its passing, for it certainly made dramatists consider, for a moment, at least, the points they were trying to make.

A story plot consists of the steps by which the story pro-

gresses. Each of these steps advances the whole story—not an incident of it alone; and each of these steps should be taken at a single stride. Each stride should include all the details necessary to the full step. A section of continuous movement in a story—a chapter, a sequence or an act—occurring in the direct road of the spectator's main line of interest, necessarily must be accepted by him as a statement of the situation of the main line of interest at that time. If the step proves not to be that, the spectator's attention will be led into a blind alley, and for the time, at least, the plot will be at a standstill. The only points absolutely vital to the story of the mastery of the Ohio, for instance, by either France or England, the contending parties, are those that show progress of one side or the other toward mastery; everything else is subordinate and should be given subordinate place.

I contend, therefore, that a continuous act of a play must, in order to be truly successful in holding attention of the central idea, be a full and complete step forward of the whole plot. You may have as many acts as the material dictates; I urge only that each act shall carry the entire plot forward. Surely no one reasonably may oppose having a point to what is being said. A story in real life, without point of some sort, is concededly flat and uninteresting; why should any one advocate the same kind of story in the theater?

At this point enough has been written to explain the actual philosophy governing the division into acts. At the same time it may not be amiss to answer directly two questions in this connection that inevitably will be in the minds of many writers. First is, how many acts should there be? And the other is, when does one begin to divide into acts?

In the eighth chapter, reference was made to some of the more important attempts to prove that the number of acts must correspond with the number of stages of plot development. There is a modicum of truth in this theory because each act naturally does cover one complete stride of the story; but in reality the division into acts depends altogether upon the material involved. Some subjects are best presented in five acts and others are more successfully done in

three. Thomas Hardy's "The Dynasts," not intended for theater presentation, however, is in three parts, nineteen acts and one hundred and thirty scenes. That diverting play "The Tavern," in which George M. Cohan appeared on Broadway, was in but two acts. Two acts was part of the formula for the old minstrel show, the subsequent vaudeville, and the still more modern "revue." Shaw's "Fanny's First Play" has an "induction," five acts and an epilogue. The idea that the "action" melodrama must be in five acts, the "society" play in four and the farce in three is entirely erroneous. Many a good melodrama has been in three acts and many a three-act farce would have been better for being given two more breaks. George Pierce Baker has made the interesting observation that Tennyson's "Becket" is really in six acts, which is not generally remarked because Act One is called a Prologue.⁴

The obvious reason for the act interval, as required by the material, is a lapse of time in the story or a change of setting. The less obvious reason is to provide a period of rest and reflection for the audience at the logical conclusion of a "chapter" of action. A large number of acts is undesirable because it tends to break the continuity of the action so often that the spell of the play is generally lost. No division into acts is equally objectionable because it affords no opportunity to the audience to consider immediate situations, destroying perspective, and causing the spectator to suffer strain from attention too long sustained—not to forget that a forced attention is unreasonably difficult for the dramatist himself to hold.⁵

Champions of the uninterrupted play—that is, one having no act divisions whatever—are fond of citing the plays of the ancients that were not divided into acts. Thus, plays of the ancient Greek tragedians and of Shakespeare have been divided into acts by later editors and not by the dramatists themselves. This might prove something if it was wholly true. The old plays did not, in actual practice, divide into "acts," but they did divide into something like them. The

⁴ "Dramatic Technique," p. 146.

⁵ See the discussion of this point in Chapter XV, p. 138.

Title - "~~Go Home to Order~~" - "~~Never to Part~~"
 "Honeymoon House"

Two young couples - boys great pals - girls
 bosom friends - have double wedding - resolve
 never to be separated. Will keep house to-
 gether - share everything - ideal life. Submits.

Boys bring brides to little house they have
~~built~~ - bought ^{XX} small fragment down, big
 mortgage

(Relatives don't agree.)

XX

Have them buy portable "cut-to-order"
 house - put it together themselves all wrong
 - get numbers mixed. Kitchen uses bathroom
 ought to be, etc. Stairway leads nowhere.

Can't get in upper part of house. Surprise
 for brides on ^{admission} night. Open with arrival
 of two couples separately. "Welcome to our
 own little home" Complications - two families
 (wasting co-operative housekeeping, all angles)
 can't live in one house

~~Wives~~ 2 brides leave husbands and
 1 Act 11.

One act - about 10 minutes

Courtesy of the Author

"HONEYMOON HOUSE" BY HERBERT HALL WINSLOW

The original synopsis of a successful vehicle especially written for Jack Norworth. Mr. Winslow is the author of nearly sixty full-length plays and some two hundred vaudeville sketches. Like Owen Davis he began writing successful melodramas in his youth, so along with his recent plays, like "What's Your Wife Doing?", may be recalled "The Great Northwest," "The Vinegar Buyer" for Ezra Kendall, "Weatherbeaten Benson," "Swell-Elegant Jones," "The Southerner" and many vehicles for Al H. Wilson and John C. Rice. As co-author with Emil Nytray of "My Lady Friends," he is also one of the authors of the phenomenally successful "No, No, Nanette" which was founded upon it.

chapters of action in the old Greek plays were marked off by intervening choral songs and what corresponded with our modern act was called an "epeisodion."⁶ Shakespeare's acts are similarly indicated by structural features.

As to when one begins dividing into acts, this again is largely a matter of material. When the dramatist first becomes sensible of the necessity in his story of a lapse of time, he naturally thinks of throwing parts of his material into either one side or the other of the break. In the same way, when his material requires radical changes of setting, it is quite reasonable that he also should begin thinking of dropping the curtain between.

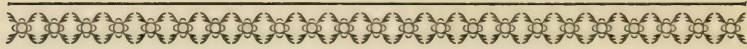
Many plays have marked changes of scene within the act. That strange phantasmagoria, "Johannes Kreisler," had perhaps seventy-five changes in all, with the stage sometimes divided into four or more parts shown in rapid succession. There are thirty-eight physical scenes in Ibsen's "Peer Gynt," Act Four having thirteen of them. There are eleven in the three acts and epilogue of Gladys Unger's "Starlight," written for Doris Keane, the first and second acts having four apiece. In these otherwise unrelated cases we find that the changes of scene within the act do not constitute act intervals because the evidence of each given situation is not yet all in, and there is no logical resting-place in the story for the audience to stop and reflect upon what has happened. When such resting-places do come, however, we have act intermissions.

Time intervals sometimes come within the act, being marked by a brief lowering of the curtain. Generally speaking, time lapses within the act are symptomatic of poor plot structure; but I dare say that now and then they are unavoidable. Most actors and producers are acutely sensitive to the fact that breaks within the act are great risks, and try earnestly to avoid them. Their efforts have led down the centuries to the curiously rapid stage meal which in reality occupies but three or four minutes filled with all kinds of "business" to obscure the artifice, and to other less obvious examples, astonishingly brief interviews and the like.

⁶ See under this word in "The Century Dictionary." See also Flickinger, "The Greek Theatre and Its Drama," Chicago, 1918, p. 145 ff. and p. 194 f.

Winthrop Ames has shown much ingenuity in camouflaging time intervals within the act, notably in his production of Arnold Bennett's "The Great Adventure," which has each of its four acts divided into two. When the stage was darkened for the change, a little electric sign arose at the curtain-line stating how long the interval was supposed to be, and then as mysteriously vanished. In another Ames production, Galsworthy's "Old English," starring George Arliss, an interval is indicated in a manner that inevitably suggests the inspiration of the movies. There is a long, slow dimming of the lights into blackness, and then a gradual return to full up. Although it does not establish the supposed length of the interval, it is better than the sign because it is neither an abrupt breaking of the spell nor an interesting mechanical distraction. As to the supposed length of the interval, that is a matter, anyway, for the dramatist to weave into his play so that the spectator is not obliged to fumble through his program to find out.⁷ In a carefully written play the characters soon convey to the audience just how long it is supposed to be since last they were seen.

⁷ How this is done is detailed in Chapters XXIV and XXV. Chapter XXIV also discusses Prologues and Epilogues.



CHAPTER XIX

THE INTERLOCKING CHAIN

THE great steps carrying the entire situation forward should be regarded as separate sequences of continuous action. Each of these sequences should consist of maximum emotional effect, which invites the comment that that is easier said than done. Granted. And yet it is easier done than at first appears.

THE MICROCOSM OF A PLAY

I BELIEVE that by this time we are agreed on the value of stating the whole play in the form of a proposition, because a proposition necessarily contains the elements of complete dramatic effectiveness. This being true, it should be worth while to construct the sequence itself in the form of a proposition. Incidentally, this makes clear, I think, the truth of what W. T. Price said so often, "Proposition is the touchstone of dramatic craftsmanship."

It may be applied to every step of action large or small. If you thoroughly understand the horse sense of proposition—the potential issue, its precipitating act, and its result or working-out—you may anticipate virtually everything there is to be said about the fundamentals of play construction. You may tell your story in propositions from the great one covering the entire play to that which states the effective arrangement of trivial facts. To begin a play by laying the framework in this manner, before troubling to write a single actual scene, saves so much trouble. You can tell thereby at the outset whether or not you have the right slant on the subject.

SEQUENCE PROPOSITIONS

THERE is a striking peculiarity about the sequence proposition. With the exception of that of the last sequence it never goes beyond its precipitating act. The point in this is that when a dramatic problem is carried to its conclusion, interest also dies. To let down interest just before the lapse that comes between sequences, would be exceedingly unwise; there should be keener interest at that point than anywhere else in the sequence, or the audience's anxious attention and sympathy that have been built up so carefully will not have sufficient momentum to bridge the gap.¹ The sequence proposition really has a final clause, but it comes in the next sequence, after the lapse, and constitutes part of the circumstances of the proposition of that new sequence. In other words, the solution of one dramatic problem really helps to present another, so that the interest of the audience cannot let down till the end of the whole play. The problems overlap.

I am sustained in my recommendation that a sequence ordinarily should consist of the solution of a preceding problem and the presentation of another, by the customary handling of an "episode" in a motion picture serial wherein one climax is unraveled and another reached. And I may add to that the definition by Dion Boucicault, master of theater-craft, "By a *sequence of incidents* we mean such a succession that each incident composing it, except the first and the last, is the result of some one of the preceding incidents, and the cause of one of the incidents coming after it in the series."²

To show you how the sequence propositions interlock, I submit the chain that constituted a working plan for the motion picture play, "Wolfe and Montcalm," the major proposition and primary plot of which already have been given.³

¹ See how cleverly Scheherazade, in "The Thousand and One Nights," breaks off the parts of that famous Serial Story, "Sinbad the Sailor."

² "The Art of Dramatic Composition."

³ Pp. 108 ff.

SEQUENCE I

Montcalm, military commander, and his jealous rival, Vaudreuil, governor-general, of New France—which, in the effort to maintain and develop a lucrative fur-trade, has provoked a war to the death with England by trying to drive the latter's Thirteen Colonies from the North American continent—have successfully resisted, mainly through the natural inaccessibility of their position, a siege of their capital city, Quebec, by James Wolfe, head of a large British punitive expedition; and now the approach of winter is about to compel the baffled Wolfe to retire.

Wolfe, to save his honor, has determined one desperate assault on Quebec before retiring, planning secretly to land troops at the Anse du Foulon, a point where the French draw up their supplies and which is lightly guarded because an attack there is thought impossible.

Montcalm and Vaudreuil, realizing Wolfe's obligation to make a parting effort, redouble their precautions, among these being a line of sentries along shore and a moving body of troops under Bougainville, to resist any attempt to land.

Wolfe, having directed Admiral Holmes's ships above the town to drift with the tide to distract Bougainville, and Saunders's ships in the basin of Que-

bec to occupy Montcalm by bombarding his location, starts on his perilous expedition, promising his dubious brigadiers that if he encounters serious opposition at any point he will give up the attempt and return to England.

Will Wolfe land without serious opposition on the French shore, or will resistance compel him to relinquish his plan and return home?

SEQUENCE II

Although Montcalm and Vaudreuil are still removed from Wolfe's zone of action, and Bougainville has been compelled by exhaustion to give up his pursuit of the moving ships, French sentries still line the shore and may summon aid at the first alarm.

In passing one of Holmes's ships Wolfe learns from the captain that the French intend landing a secret convoy of much needed provisions at the Foulon that night, so he plans to pass his own boats in advance of the schedule as the convoy.

Bougainville, alarmed by the strange activity of the English, cancels the order for the provision boats to move that night.

Wolfe, unaware of the postponement but prepared for instant action in any event, leaves the English ship and rows on his way toward shore.

Will Wolfe's dependence on the ruse lead him into a trap, or will he discover his mistake in time and reach land without detection?

SEQUENCE III

The French sentries on shore have not received word of the postponement of the supply convoy, but nevertheless challenge Wolfe.

One of Wolfe's men adroitly answers the sentry in his own language, and when too hard pressed, orders the sentry to be quiet or he will alarm the English and cause the capture of the supplies, this sufficing for Wolfe's temporary escape from detection.

One of the French sentries, not satisfied by the look of the boats or by the answers given to the challenges, notifies his captain to make further investigation.

Wolfe lands safely at the Foulon with his advance guard.

Will Wolfe be able to climb the cliff with his men, or will the French discover his identity and raise the alarm?

SEQUENCE IV

The alarm is given, and the French atop the cliff at the post of Samos fire guns at boatloads of soldiers coming in the second detachment to reënforce Wolfe.

Wolfe's advance band reaches the top of the heights, overpowers the negligent guard there

and captures prisoners from whom information is gained.

Montcalm hears the firing at Samos and receiving no explanation from Vaudeuil, who is stationed much nearer the scene, goes to investigate for himself.

Wolfe aligns his soldiers on the plains atop the heights before Quebec for the expected battle with the defenders of the town.

Will Wolfe, his reënforcements cut off, be able to defeat Montcalm and compel surrender of Quebec, or will Montcalm and his superior numbers overwhelm him and annihilate his force?

SEQUENCE V

The perverseness of Vaudreuil in giving contradictory orders and in regarding the appearance of the English on the plains as trivial, handicaps Montcalm in assembling troops to join him in the attack on Wolfe, but delay being dangerous, he charges the English with those soldiers he is able to procure at once, and Wolfe is killed.

Wolfe's men, acting by his last instructions, meet the charging French with one great volley, and drive the enemy back into Quebec, mortally wounding Montcalm.

The divided ranks of the English as they pursue the French offer excellent opportunity to the Indian allies of the latter, and they prepare to swoop down and massacre the invaders.

The English commanders see their danger, recall their troops from pursuit of the French and begin entrenching themselves to besiege the town at close range.

Will the English, commanding the approaches to Quebec, compel the surrender of the town, or will the French, protected by the walls of Quebec, bombard the English and drive them down again to the river?

SEQUENCE VI

Although Montcalm is dead and Vaudreuil has fled with the body of the French army leaving orders for the surrender of Quebec, Ramezay, the officer in charge, determines to hold the town.

The English, entrenched on the plains, issue their ultimatum to the defenders of Quebec.

Lévis, the commander of the French forces protecting the west, having learned with indignation of the defeat at Quebec and the retreat of Vaudreuil, hurries to the relief of Ramezay before he capitulates.

The English prepare to batter the walls of Quebec to the ground.

Will the English be able to compel the French at Quebec to surrender before they secure reinforcements, or will the reinforcements arrive and prolong the struggle?

SEQUENCE VII

Word comes to Ramezay to hold out because Lévis is nearing Quebec with reinforcements.

But as word comes to Ramezay of the approach of Lévis, a messenger leaves his quarters with the signed articles of surrender, and the English have won.

When the circumstances out of which the problem grows are all presented, and the precipitating act has made the fight to a finish inevitable, the audience appreciates the opportunity afforded by the lapse, to withdraw briefly and weigh the situation—to consider probable outcome in the light of the known facts, to enjoy briefly that omniscience that is the privilege of the spectator in the theater. With the precipitating act the problem of the sequence is automatically stated; and interest necessarily is at its height because here is the moment of greatest possible doubt as to outcome. The condition could not be better for carrying the interest of the audience across the intermission.

LAPSES OF TIME

THE dramatist more commonly makes his act fit his lapses than the other way around. He first considers the forward steps of his story with lapses as they naturally fall, and then builds the steps so that each concludes with suspense that carries interest over to the next act. There are times, however, when the story is dramatically stronger for breaking a single natural sequence into two—the natural sequence really constituting two steps forward along the main line of interest. If kept together, they would neutralize each other and bring about that unfortunate state of affairs known as anticlimax. Once again, here as elsewhere, the dramatist is called upon to exercise intelligent discrimination.

One may declare that this manner of handling forces

the playwright to cramp good material into an arbitrary plan. I reply that the playwright must work in the light of relative importance of material if he wants to achieve better results. All dramatic material belongs to one of three kinds of dramatic action: the circumstances out of which action grows, the action itself, or the end of that action. The action itself is the most important, because that is where maximum interest lies. The circumstances out of which action grows necessarily are subordinate and are to be got out of the way as promptly as possible in order to arrive at the most interesting part; the end of the action is not so important as the action proper, because it ends interest as well as the story. Therefore, the conscientious dramatist is compelled by all reasonable considerations, to treat beginnings and ends of action with brevity. The action proper is of such importance that it determines all the rest. The body of the action, that the playwright wants to keep untrammelled, I also want to keep free; and consequently there cannot really be a quarrel between us.

The duration of a lapse of time may be of any length provided that the continuity of thought is not broken. The drop of the curtain may represent a period of three seconds or twenty years; its effectiveness depends upon the material concerned. Jacques Forget-Not, in "Orphans of the Storm," cherishes a grudge against a nobleman's son that is to place that person, now grown to manhood, on the platform of the guillotine; the lapse of years, so far as Jacques is concerned, is but an instant, because in it the grudge has grown into an unreasoning hatred. If in the lapse the grudge had died out, the sequence of action that followed would have lost much of the impetus it derives by continuing the emotion. From which it appears that a lapse has not only an anticipatory value, but one in retrospect.

To justify an interval of years requires great care; and because human feeling, as shown by characters, does not ordinarily intensify itself with the passage of time and the obliteration of memories, long time lapses in plays usually are symptomatic of poor structure. One of the greatest difficulties of a long time lapse is not merely the probable let-

down in interest, but also the necessity of reestablishing the characters and their changed relations to each other.

All working dramatists appreciate the importance of holding interest over the lapse ⁴ although they do not always know how to obtain it. From early times people of the theater have worked to ring down their curtains on "smashing big effects," if these amounted to no more than "ensemble scenes" in which the full cast of characters stood in a semicircle around the footlights.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

THERE are several lesser observations to be made about sequence propositions that may prove helpful. First, your attention is called to the fact that in each sequence, the main contending parties are identical with those in the major proposition of the play, and that the sympathetic side does not change its character. Amplification of a plot does not mean an increase or change in parallel lines of interest, but an attenuation of the existing lines. After the major circumstances are established, the issue should be clear and constant between the same two parties. Furthermore, although the action of the sequence changes the circumstances of the major issue, the question automatically presented at its close should be in its essentials the same as the question presented by the major proposition—will this side triumph over that, or will our worst fears be realized?

Generally speaking, the sequence opens with the sympathetic side of the issue in unfortunate circumstances, because so soon as he has triumphed over his opposition, the audience's interest in his struggle lets down. If it is impracticable to begin with the distress of the sympathetic party, which is first-hand presentation, open with the triumph of the unsympathetic side which is only a degree less effective. The

⁴In "A Winter's Tale" Shakespeare frankly states his problem concerning a lapse to his audience. The lapse in question occurs between acts three and four, and lasts nominally for sixteen years. The dramatist introduces Time "as Chorus" to solicit forbearance over the interval, and to review what has taken place in it, namely, that Leontes has shut himself up with his grief, that Perdita has been reared as a shepherd's daughter, and so forth. The technical purpose of the lapse is really just to allow Perdita to grow up.

sequence usually closes with the sympathetic side rebelling against the tyranny of the unsympathetic side, because that is what effectually precipitates the problem. Generally speaking, every sequence but the last concludes with the menace in the ascendant; the reverse destroys suspense over the time lapse that follows by making it seem that the issue is over.

So soon as the precipitating act becomes a culminating act, the play is at an end, for then there is no problem left to solve. Still, the audience never will be satisfied with an outcome that leaves the object of their sympathy dominated and miserable. The surrender of Washington at Fort Necessity does not end "The Gateway to the West." They realize, perhaps in anticipation of their desires, that the action must go on until the issue is settled satisfactorily. The form of this satisfaction is determined by the direction of sympathy aroused by the dramatist; and therefore, because he has set that sympathy going, it is his obligation to meet its requirements. If a playwright permits and encourages his audience to expect a certain administration of justice at the end of his play and then fails to realize it, he has not done his duty, and no amount of alibi-ing will make the public accept his conclusion.

The last sequence of the chain obviously requires an especial treatment. It does not culminate in an extension of the issue, but it ends the play. In that sequence occurs the death-blow. To prevent the audience's anticipation of this requires all the skill of the dramatist. Otherwise, in the lingo of the theater, the audience "will walk out on him." He must write this portion of the play so that its action is swift and sure.⁵

In reality, the final sequence may be said to consist merely of the final clause of the proposition of the sequence immediately preceding it—the "penultimate act" as the critics are fond of saying. Hence, the anticipation of the audience is likely to overreach itself back there. Hence, also, this penultimate act is where the dramatist commonly outdoes

⁵ "The Full Close," which is Chap. XXI of William Archer's "Play-Making," is excellent collateral reading here.

himself. His dramatic struggle is almost over, and he therefore tries with might and main to convince the audience that it is not. There is a convenient illustration of such a triumph of theatrical effect in "The Woman in Room 13."

This stage melodrama contains a variety of "irrevocable" situations; but perhaps the greatest of them is at the close of the play where a husband is accused of murdering his benefactor because he believed that the benefactor held his wife prisoner in a hotel room. If the wife really was in that room—and appearances are very strongly that she was there in equivocal circumstances—the husband may gain his liberty through "the unwritten law;" but if the noble husband chooses to believe that his wife was not there and was therefore stainless, he must be sentenced for indefensible murder. The audience knows that the wife was not in the room, although the benefactor actually lured her to the hotel; another woman chanced to be in the room instead, she having first warned the wife to leave by telling her of her own illicit relations with the benefactor. The wife is now torn between the agony of knowing that to tell the truth—that she is blameless and was not in the room—will send her husband to the electric chair, and the certainty that to save him by stating that she was in the room and so giving him the "unwritten law" plea, will turn him against her when he is free. The situation is so contrived that the audience cannot see any way out of it, while they cannot fail to sympathize deeply with the husband and wife concerned.

This sort of theatrical craftsmanship is merely the expression of a knowledge of the resources of the medium. When a dramatist knows where to place his emphasis, where to develop his effects, how to strengthen character and to do the other things that belong to his profession, he doesn't think about his technical touch, but only about the story he is trying to tell. The free and complete utterance of that is the only guide of which is he conscious.

When sequences are planned and their interrelation established, the great body of his work is done; and soon after he may give free rein to his fancy in development of scenes and subtleties of character.



PART SEVEN

DETAILED ACTION

CHAPTER XX

DEMONSTRATION

A PLAY should progress to a point, and the sequences should be successive steps toward that point; each sequence should progress to a lesser point, and the episodes¹ within it should be successive steps toward *that* point. Furthermore, each episode moves towards its own little point, the contained incidents bringing it out as they are added, one to another. I have tried to make clear, in this connection, that when the dramatist has come to understand the making of proposition and of plot, he has virtually all he needs for play-building, because plot indicates sequences and proposition applies to each of these. Now I purpose to show that by questioning sequence proposition after the fashion of quizzing major proposition in order to find plot, one may provide episodes within the sequence, and make smaller propositions out of those.

EPISODES

THE process does not go on *ad infinitum*; I never have applied proposition to action smaller than an episode, although W. T. Price demonstrated that it might be applied to in-

¹ It is a little unfortunate that there seems to be no other word that is convenient as a term for the parts that make up a plot step, for an episode, strictly speaking, is a digression from the main theme; and in the present sense it is anything but that. The word "incident," which might serve, is needed later to describe the still smaller parts that make up an "episode."

cidents and scenes within the incident. When I have structure worked out in that detail, I trust my imagination to carry the rest. But to bring proposition to episode is important here because it carries some vital corollaries.

We are so far freed from the need of definitions at this stage that I may offer an actual working demonstration of how a sequence may be planned, beginning with the mere establishment of the step as a development of the major proposition, and carrying it through to the detailed action. I do not want to take an opening sequence, because that involves introduction of characters and exposition of facts that occurred before the play begins—matters that I will discuss later; so I will use the second sequence of "The Gateway to the West." Problems here may be called fairly representative of the sequence structural problems in any play. "The Gateway to the West" is particularly useful because earlier references to it have made the reader somewhat familiar with its subject matter.

The issue of this play lies in the opposition of England and France, the bone of contention being mastery of the key to the West on the Ohio. As soon as one nation or the other finally gains this key and holds it for good, the play is over. We know from our histories that England finally obtains the key, so until England does secure it, the play cannot end. Each step of progress on England's part toward gaining the key, wherein something is definitely accomplished to keep up the audience's belief in the possibility that she *may* get the key—has a fighting chance for it, in other words—is a natural chapter or sequence of continuous action.

Each sequence contains a "main assertion" of the latest condition of the parties at issue—of a development of the issue worked out by the conflicting parties. Each main assertion has "limiting clauses," necessarily stated in order that the main assertion itself may be understood. As the limiting clauses, or circumstances, expressly belong to the main assertion of the chapter or sequence, they should be grouped in the same continuous chapter or sequence with the main assertion to which they belong.

The main assertion of the second sequence in "The Gate-

way to the West" is that the French commit the overt act of war by attacking Trent's Fort, which the English have begun to erect on the Ohio, and that, contrary to expectations (in view of Lieutenant-Governor Dinwiddie's failure to obtain funds from the Virginia House of Burgesses in the first sequence), the English are prepared to retaliate with military force. You see, the main assertion contains the specific advance of the plot, and clearly states the strength of each party to the main issue, at that time. To describe the strength of only one party to the issue would not be enough; the great step forward of the whole story requires full explanation of both sides of the issue so far as they have been taken.

The circumstances, or limiting clauses of the main assertion here are these: the English have begun to erect a fort at the Forks of the Ohio (the site of modern Pittsburgh), and Lieutenant-Governor Dinwiddie, by advancing money out of his own pocket, has raised a force to defend the Ohio if the French overt act comes. If these circumstances are explained, and the French attack on the fort is shown with the English ready to retaliate, all of the "must" material of the sequence is in hand.

NECESSARY FACTS

I SHALL state rather fully the facts that require establishment in this way for the sake of making an accurate survey of structural possibilities. The English, under Ensign Ward, have begun building a fort at the Forks of the Ohio for the purpose of protecting their interests in the region. The strategic position, where the Alleghany and the Monongahela join to form the Ohio River, was selected by Washington on his return trip from Fort le Bœuf whither he went to order the French to remove. Ward is hurrying to complete the fort before the French may descend upon it. Ward and his comrades expect the French to attempt to drive them out. Ward also hourly expects Washington with reënforcements. Dinwiddie has secured troops by raising money out of his own pocket. Washington actually is on his way with the first

half of the so-called "Virginia Regiment." The French really are descending on the fort, 500 strong. The French surround Ward and his forty carpenters, and plant cannon against the fort. They summon Ward to surrender, giving him an hour to decide. Washington is on his way, hoping that the French will commit the overt act of war (which will throw the responsibility on the enemy), but hoping to occupy the fort before it comes. Ward determines to wait until the last moment of his hour in hope that Washington and his force will arrive. Washington, on his way, receives word that the French are descending on the fort, and increases his speed to the rescue.

A proposition should include a clear statement of the conflicting aims of the two sides at issue. Therefore, I should say that the first step, in formulating the material already in hand, might be to arrange it in two columns representing the respective stories of the two parties at issue—namely, French and English. Looking at the main assertion it is found that what the French side has to accomplish in the sequence, is to commit the overt act of war by attacking Trent's Fort; the English, on the other hand, have to build Trent's Fort and hurry reënforcements to its defense. For the sake of making the illustration sharper, I may add that, before the French attack Trent's Fort, they must have reënforced their own position as present masters of the Ohio. Of course, it is clear that in the course of events, each fact must have preceded or followed another; and this dictates a chronological arrangement:

ENGLISH	FRENCH
English start building Trent's Fort to protect their interests in the Ohio region.	French reënforce their position as masters of the Ohio.
English hurry reënforcements to defense of Trent's Fort.	French attack Trent's Fort while it is in process of construction.

Now, this doesn't look much like a proposition; but it accomplishes an important step toward formulating one. The

parties to the issue, as well as their respective acts, have been sharply divided.

A choice must be made. Which of these two sides is that for which the sympathetic interest of the audience must be enlisted? Of course, that was determined when the major proposition was established. The English side shall be the sympathetic side here as well as in all other sequences. Therefore, the English story must be the main story. It is known, furthermore, that interest naturally lies with the under dog; but while the agony has been piled on the sympathetic side, and the sequence is to be ended when the future is darkest, interest must be sustained by showing the pluckiness of the sympathetic side—showing it with its back to the wall, so to speak, but fighting still, and with a chance (however slim) of winning out.

In view of the elaborate explanation of the method of formulating proposition that has been made in earlier pages, it is unnecessary to explain at length why the two stories are dovetailed to present the following syllogism:

ENGLISH

(Sympathetic assertion of right compelled by original aggression of French in asserting their claim.)

England begins building Trent's Fort in substantiation of her claim to the Ohio and to protect it for her settlers, this because of the action of France.

FRENCH

(Original assertion of right, constituting an aggressive and hence unsympathetic act.)

France has fortified the Ohio in substantiation of her claim.

(Refusal of unsympathetic side to permit infringement of its alleged rights.)

French descend in overwhelming numbers on Trent's Fort to reduce it.

(Precipitating act, or refusal of sympathetic side to submit to infringement of alleged rights forcing immediate settlement of issue.)

English hurry reënforcements to defense of Trent's Fort.

Will the English reënforcements reach Trent's Fort in time to withstand the French assault, or will the French capture the stronghold and drive the English from the Ohio, even at risk of assuming responsibility for war?

The subject of the "overt act" is stressed, because that is what is to relieve the Province of Virginia from unaided defense of the West. As soon as war between the nations is precipitated, it becomes all England against all France.

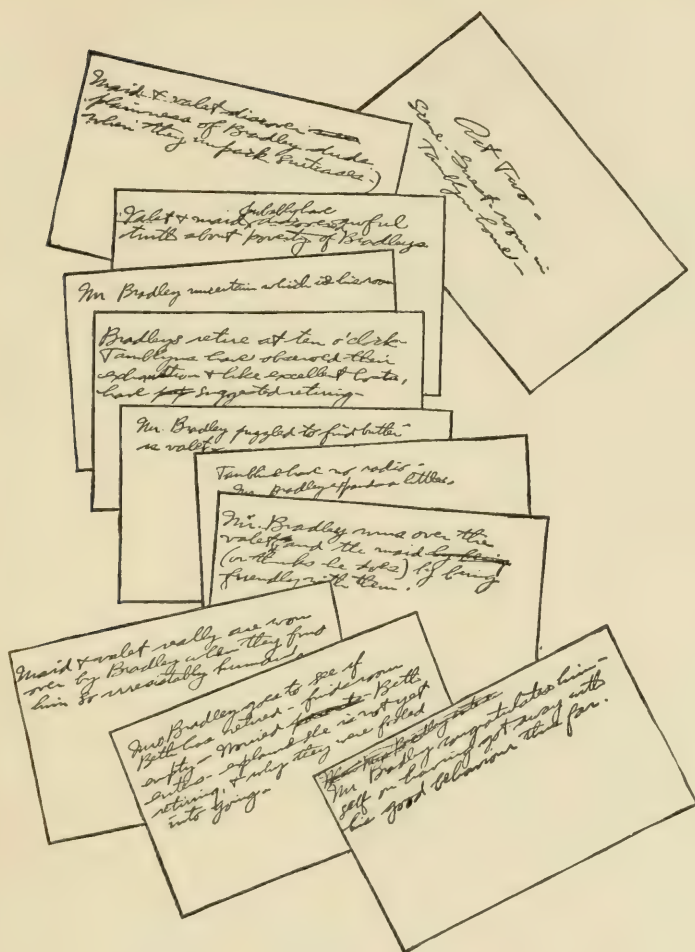
EPISODE PROPOSITIONS

HAVING the sequence proposition, the episodes composing it must be developed. This step is exactly the same sort of thing—save that it is on a smaller scale—that was done with the major proposition of the whole play when the sequences themselves were determined. The facts are taken in the order in which they occur in the proposition, and questioned until all details are yielded:

English building Trent's Fort.	{	When is this?
		Have French committed overt act?
		Have Burgesses voted funds to Dinwiddie?
		Why are English building this fort?
		Where are soldiers to defend it?
		If available, why aren't they here?
		Why is fort built at this spot?
French descend to reduce fort.	{	Do French know fort is being built?
		If so, do they intend to interfere?
		How did French learn about fort?
		May this be considered the overt act?
		Is Washington coming to rescue?
		Can Ward defend fort without Washington?
		If not, can he delay his surrender?
English reënforcements coming.	{	Does Washington know of French coming?
		Can he arrive in one hour?
		How did Washington learn of danger to fort?
		Is his force strong enough to defeat French?

The questions are suggested by the broad facts; and the answers to them provide virtually all the historical details necessary to the sequence. When the resultant collection of material is large, I find it expedient to jot each fact on a card and shuffle the lot until they are in chronological order.

Then I jot them down in two columns representing the respective sides at issue, and consider them for their dramatic movement. This inevitably shows two or more successive and complete strides forward of the sympathetic side of the issue—or the story proper—to achieve the object of the sequence. That is, steps that develop the sequence just as the sequences develop the plot. Each of these little steps is what, merely for convenience here, I call an episode. Of



BUILDING A PLAY WITH INDEX CARDS

The illustration shows a few of the hundred or so similar notes from which was written the first draft of a new play by the author of the present book. By jotting ideas on separate cards the collection may easily be revised, rearranged or supplemented. The method is an old one, very popular with the French dramatists of the past century. I believe Sardou used it, and also the younger Dumas. It is commonly employed everywhere today. I find it a stimulus to freedom of thought and a great convenience in carrying my workshop with me when traveling long distances by land or sea.

course, there is no arbitrary number of episodes any more than there is any fixed number of sequences. And in the process of simplification of the story that it may be absorbed easily by the spectator, I unify the material in each episode by formulating it as a little proposition.

The successive steps in the present sequence from "The Gateway to the West" are quite as I already have stated them: (1) The English are building Trent's Fort to establish their claim to the Ohio; (2) The French descend from their own stronghold to demolish the English stronghold and drive out its garrison; (3) English reënforcements, under Washington, are coming to occupy Trent's Fort. Each little proposition has the same parties at issue as the proposition of each sequence and as the major proposition of the play as a whole:

ENGLISH

FRENCH

FIRST EPISODE

France has refused to remove from land claimed and needed by England.

Certain that France will resist necessary expansion of the English into the West, Dinwiddie demands more money from his Burgesses for defense, having spent his own money and the funds they already have voted him.

France, in substantiation of her claim and anticipating trouble with England, has filled the Ohio region with soldiers from Canada.

Dinwiddie's English expedition, under Ensign Ward, begins building a fort at the Forks of the Ohio on the Canada-Louisiana line, a place selected by Washington as the Key to the West.

Will the French commit the overt act of war against the English and drive them out, or will the English be able to hold their position?

SECOND EPISODE

The French on the Ohio, under Contrecoeur, lieutenant to Duquesne, governor-general of Canada, leave their base at Fort le Bœuf, to drive the English from the Forks of the Ohio.

Washington is coming with the first half of the "Virginia Regiment" to occupy the English fort at the Forks of the Ohio.

The French force descends on Trent's Fort and begins surrounding it.

Ensign Ward, commanding at Trent's Fort, sends a man with word to Washington.

Will Washington be summoned in time to save the fort, or will the French compel Ward to surrender?

THIRD EPISODE

The French capture Ward's messenger.

Ward determines to hold out till the last minute, hoping thereby to gain time for Washington to come to his rescue.

Contrecoeur gives Ward one hour to surrender.

Washington hears from other quarters of the French menace and orders his men forward at increased speed.

Will Washington arrive in time to save the fort, or will the French become masters of the Forks of the Ohio?

I must call your attention to some particular features of this material that will show how it was "built up" to gain dramatic effect. One is that there is no history to show that Ward sent a messenger to tell Washington of his plight at Trent's Fort. The purpose is to develop the tenseness of the situation by holding out some hope that Ward will not be obliged to surrender. The same thing applies to Washington's increased speed when he hears of the French move. Washington actually was too many miles away to be of the slightest assistance, although he really was hurrying along to the rescue as fast as he could. A third point without substantiation in the records, is Ward's determination to hold out till the last minute of the hour given him by Contreccœur.

DRAMATIZING HISTORY

IN ALL these cases, however, there are grounds of probability with shreds of fact; and it must be observed that the essential truths of history are not violated. As dramatizing actual facts is not uncommon, it may be useful to detail this point. Ward knew that reinforcements were coming to him from over the mountains, so it is likely that when he learned of the French approach he would endeavor to notify Washington. Having gained the desired dramatic effect, the messenger complication is disposed of by having the French capture him, another figment of fancy. Washington actually heard of the French designs against Trent's Fort, not quite as stated in the continuity, but in circumstances hazy enough to afford room for our imagination. We justify many of these things by negative proof—lack of evidence to the contrary—but we always are careful to stick to the fundamental truths.

During my tenure of office as managing editor of the corporation engaged in producing these screen histories, I was asked by several of the men on the continuity staff how far they might speculate on facts; my answer was as above. The necessity for drawing conclusions that would make the plays more effective dramatically, was evident at the outset of the work. In writing "Columbus" I found diffi-

culties in the very first sequence in fitting together the jigsaw puzzle of history. The way out seemed to lie in the same method that is used by historians themselves, namely the honest interpretation of the records. Contemporaneous records of events written by eye-witnesses are not necessarily true. Columbus wrote that he saw a light on the night of October 11, 1492; but there are historians who believe that he only said he did in order to claim the rewards that had been offered for the discovery of land. Various alleged histories of the first Virginia colonization were written at the time; but these must be considered for the particular axe each author had to grind in the politics of his day. Frequently we may arrive at impartial judgment only reading the varying accounts by stubbornly prejudiced persons. Some sort of interpretation is inevitable, for historians disagree as violently as doctors of medicine.

We know that Columbus learned somewhere that King John of Portugal had played a mean trick on him by sending out a secret expedition to test his plans; but history is mute on the manner of his discovery. It was part of my problem in hand to show this discovery. Examination of the facts narrowed the probability down to the chances that Columbus learned either through seafaring acquaintances or through court gossip. I endeavored to combine these views by having Columbus hear the statements of a boastful old sailor who had been on the secret expedition, while both are in the ante-chamber of King John's palace at Lisbon. I even had the old sailor brag that he had been over the edge of the earth and sprained his arm pulling himself back again, a bold license, if you will, but one that was received with enthusiasm by certain learned professors who realized that it established in action the vulgar notion of that day that the earth was flat. The essential impression was true. Columbus did learn that he had been duped; it did not greatly matter just how he found it out. We know, further, that Columbus left Portugal soon after, "secretly, at night." There are reasons to believe that he ran off to escape his creditors. I made it appear than he ran off to elude efforts to keep him in Portugal while the secret expedition was trying out his plans. It

doesn't particularly matter why he went; the only vital point is that he left the country furtively and went to Spain.

Of course, if positive information existed on these details, I scarcely would have dared to take the liberties I have mentioned; and I certainly would not recommend similar ones in contradiction of other records.

While I was tracing out the little chain of episode propositions in this second sequence of "The Gateway to the West," it probably dawned upon you that I was running into an inconsistency in my own line of reasoning. If interest drops when a proposition is worked out to its end, why won't the interest die at the end of each episode proposition in the sequence and so destroy the continuity of the sequence? A very sensible objection. Only the difficulty has been anticipated by screen dramatists, and circumvented. In fact, the remedy has been suggested as far back as page 179. We end a sequence on the precipitating act of its proposition, and the working-out of the problem, instead of ending the interest, becomes the circumstances out of which the proposition of the succeeding sequence is made. In other words, before the problem of one proposition may come to an end, materials for a fresh line of interest are introduced. This is the same manner in which audience interest is carried across intermissions between acts.

CHAPTER XXI

TRANSLATION OF FACTS

WITH the facts of the play structure as much in hand as they are at this stage of the work, the dramatist may give his attention to their interpretation in the terms of the medium. When a man has trained his mind to the playwriting habit, this becomes a matter of course.

THE DRAMATIST'S VIEWPOINT

THE adapter of "The Gateway to the West" had the following facts to translate into drama at the very opening of his action:

The modern city of Pittsburgh has a marvelous history; here the English-speaking race won its mastery of the West; in 1753 the expanding population of the Thirteen English Colonies along the Atlantic seaboard was spilling over the Alleghanies into the West; but the West already was occupied by French *voyageurs* who used the Ohio as a broad highway connecting the French settlements in Canada with those in Louisiana; the Indian aborigines did not resent the presence of the French because the French did not try to dispossess them; the French wanted the Indians to keep their hunting-grounds because thereby the lucrative fur-trade, which was all they cared about in America, was sustained; the English, on the other hand, wanted the land for homes, and would level the forests with their axes and plant corn in the hunting-grounds; hence the Indians resented the coming of the English; the French resent the coming of the English, too, but can do nothing because the two nations are at peace; they may instigate the Indians to destroy the English, however, and this they do; England is planning some action on her own side, but at this point all we know is that a soldier, an officer of the Virginia

militia (George Washington), with several companions, has entered the wilderness on some unknown errand, but evidently headed for Fort le Bœuf.

Many other facts are added to these before the sequence is brought to an end; but enough are given here to prepare for showing how they were translated.

The play was opened with a view of some mighty blast furnaces in a modern American city, this being followed by a title, "Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where the smoke and clamor of modern industry completely hide a great epic of early American history." A general view of the business section of the inland metropolis came next, and this was succeeded by another title, "In this valley behind the Atlantic seaboard was enacted the tremendous drama that determined the mastery of the West by the English-speaking race." Then there was another view of the heart of Pittsburgh, with a jumble of pedestrians, automobiles, and street-cars, which presently dissolved to a view of a mountain ridge in a wild, virgin country. Over this ridge is going a pack-train, a pioneer family dressed in costumes of a bygone day. Another title says, "The colorful year 1753, when the expanding population of the Thirteen English Colonies started to spill over the Alleghanies into the west."

The pioneer family disappears over the ridge; and then we are shown a river in the same country. Two canoes approach. They contain four Indians and two white men, and quantities of furs. Again we have explanation in a title: "The first white men to follow these waters were French *coureurs-de-bois*. They found the Ohio a broad highway connecting Canada with Louisiana." A more sustained view of the white men, with their strange, half-civilized, half-barbaric dress, requires further explanation, "Boon-companions of the savages, caring for nothing in their country but the furs, leaving their hunting-grounds undisturbed by ax or plow." Here we come again to the pack-train, slipping and easing down the other side of the ridge. Some brush interferes, and the men of the party begin chopping it away.

The sound of this is heard by the men in the canoes in the

river below. They listen, and then, at the command of one of the Frenchmen, pull to shore. They land. They stealthily watch the party from behind trees. The French leader observes them angrily. An Indian companion points to the invaders and asks, "English . . . ?" And the Frenchman nods and says, ". . . with axes to level your forests and corn to plant your hunting-grounds." At this the Indians grasp their guns and start off through the trees in the general direction of the pack-train. The French leader catches the hindmost by the arm, and shakes his head gently. He says, "My child, we are at peace with the English." Whereupon the Indian turns upon him sternly and replies, "Then let my father stay here," and runs off. At this the second Frenchman approaches the leader, a look of horror on his face, and plainly protests the going of the savages. The leader turns on him with a snarl and says, "Don't be a fool! That's what Indians are for." And when the second man considers the new thought, he appreciates the sagacity of his companion.

Meanwhile the Indians are overtaking the pack-train. But through a clearing, somewhere in the vicinity, a new party is passing. First come three strange Indians afoot, followed by eight white men on horseback, these being followed in turn by five laden pack-horses led by another Indian. The two foremost white men wear long cloaks, but the others wear the ordinary frontiersmen's dress. Just as the French Indians are raising their guns to fire on the pack-train, one hears the new party—and they all draw out of the way in time to avoid detection. One of the French redskins hurries back to warn his white leader. Meantime, one of the becloaked white men of the new party stops to remove a stone from his horse's hoof; and as he throws his cloak back out of the way, over his shoulder, a uniform is revealed. A subtitle comments upon it— "An unusual sight on the Ohio—the uniform of an adjutant-general of the Virginia militia."

While the man in uniform is proceeding then, with his companions, an Indian is passing the warning to the French leader, "English! . . . Soldiers!" But the Frenchman's lip curls with disdain and he says: "We are not women. Twelve men cannot drive us out of the Ohio!" Presently the

rest of the French Indians arrive. One adds to the first news by making a gesture and saying, "They went north," which the French leader considers and explains by remarking, "They're going to Fort le Bœuf."

The late Robert Glasgow—who had so very much to do with the organization of this great venture into educational picture work—was the first man outside the scenario department to view this manuscript. When I gave it to him he began reading it at once; and he had read just about to the point where I have concluded when he laughed aloud and slapped his knee with delight. "That's it, that's it!" he exclaimed. Then, turning to me, he said, "*This is interpretation!*"

INTERPRETATION

AND so it is. Interpretation in human, visual, emotional terms, of the dry facts of history. It was done no less in "The Puritans," where, in order to accomplish what no popular history has achieved before—make clear the distinction between Pilgrims and Puritans—the adapter brought to the Bay Colony an imaginary stranger seeking residence where John Winthrop was governor. According to the colony regulations, this stranger is obliged first to declare his religious convictions before the elders; and when this is done, the elders decide that he must depart for Plymouth, for he is not a Puritan, but a Pilgrim. This is only the same approach to material that was used by the continuity writer for W. S. Hart's photoplay, "The Whistle," when he showed the time of day with a watch examined when the whistle blew, and "in the morning" by a view of a milk bottle on a back doorstep, with a stray dog drinking the milk.

To translate the facts of story into drama calls for all the dramatist's ingenuity, particularly when the story is more or less subjective. Take a real problem. How would you register the revulsion of feeling felt by a young gentleman whenever he thinks of the fact that his sweetheart is a domestic servant? How would you interpret the thought itself? Edward Knoblock met these probably unprecedented diffi-

culties in his stage play, "Tiger! Tiger!" by having the young man insist that the girl shall cover up her hands coarsened by housework, and establishes his revulsion by having him notice the odor of cooked cabbage in her hair. In other words, Knoblock "put over" the internal, psychological change by translating it into external symbols.

Many of the great men of history are leaders who merely sit at their desks and plan action for others. At first glance, they do not appear to be fit subjects for plays. Yet, star parts for actors have been provided in Sir Thomas Dale and John Winthrop, both being characters who answer this seemingly forbidden description; and there are others who are by no means persons of visible animation—the results of their scheming are evident not in their own, intimate surroundings, but in changed expressions of national life. An eminent chief-justice, like John Marshall, or a great orator, like Daniel Webster, would seem impossible to use effectively in a play; but I prefer not to say so. The very intimation that such things "cannot" be done should be the best possible incentive to a dramatist to do them.

Dramatic interpretation means principally the ability to view facts with the eyes of the audience. When the appeal is not intelligible to the audience the dramatist fails of his purpose. To indicate time by the face of a clock to persons unable to tell time is as futile as it is to quote poetry to a stone-deaf audience. You may convey ideas to an audience only in terms it may recognize. As a craftsman the dramatist knows that his artistic resources have been dictated by the attitude of his audience; and he must remember that always. Carelessness about this is instantly apparent. When I read in a manuscript stage play, some years ago, the direction that, "the sound of a silver whistle is heard in the distance," I knew at once that the author was not judging his effect with the ears of his audience. It was a trivial slip of course; but the same careless habit might lead easily to the omission of important plot facts. Dramatists should ask their play action at frequent intervals, "What of?" and "What if?"

The audience must have some means of learning facts; it cannot possibly know a connection of ideas that the dramatist

makes altogether in his own mind. Later explanations are worthless. Whatever is to be said should be given in the play at the time it is most needed, which reminds me of a curious fact, that Samuel Pepys noted in his diary about the year 1667, that a long and tedious letter omitted from the stage action of "The Black Prince," produced at the Duke's Theater, London, was printed and distributed among the spectators because it was vital to the plot.



CHAPTER XXII

BUSINESS

THE physical movement about the scene is known traditionally in the theater as "business." It is the most objective sort of animation in a play—an excellent reason why there should be plenty of it. In the theater they say that business should be substituted for lines wherever possible. Business is employed to convey facts or ideas necessary to full understanding of the play, to lend variety by way of animation, to give the illusion of reality and to prolong emotion. I am not trying to pigeonhole the subject with these divisions; but I want to show it up from all reasonable angles.

DEVELOPING EMOTION

W. T. PRICE once told me that he first was impressed with the importance of dramatic business when they were rehearsing his play, "My Old Kentucky Home."¹ One of the actors, who portrayed a racing tout, was describing a scene at the track. Acting purely in accordance with his own conception, he sat astraddle of a chair, talking to his companions across the chair-back upon which his arms rested. As he warmed to his narrative, he began holding imaginary reins to the chair-back and clucking to it until he gave his hearers the impression that he was a jockey and the chair a pony. It helped tremendously to convey the impression that Price had seen until then only in his words. This same actor impressed Price again in a later scene in which he was required to bestow a coin on a girl who was collecting for charity. The actor

¹ Produced in 1884, as the first venture of Marc Klaw as a producing manager, starring Effie Ellsler and with William H. Thompson and Archie Boyd in the cast.

reached into his waistcoat pocket for a coin, but drew out a poker chip; then, discovering his error with much apparent embarrassment, he put back the chip and took out money. It was both consistent with, and a revelation of, individual character.

For purposes of animation one finds all manner of business: a man performing a friendly act for his valet, who is laden down with luggage, by using his abnormally heavy hand to kill a mosquito on the valet's face;² a woman scrubbing the floor while a man with muddy boots tracks across it; catching a fly in a sugar-bowl; serving tea; and so on. W. T. Price used to say that an actress could get more business out of a tray of tea-things than out of any other stage properties.

Appearance of reality may be tripping over a drawing-room rug; putting on a hat hindside before; pulling down a shade only to have it fly up again; having a bookcase door stick when it is opened; cutting one's lip in licking the flap of an envelope to seal it; catching drops from a leaky water-cup; extreme politeness to a pretty girl, and so forth, and so forth, all facts in everyday experience. Plays written by actors are conspicuous for business of this type, for actors understand its value. Nervous human beings in real life twist buttons on coats of persons they address; abstracted lovers thoughtlessly fill their coffee-cups with sugar; the sneak-thief in high society will look covetously at the silver; the man at the office telephone will draw pictures on the blotter; and instances might be multiplied a thousand times to show how faithfully actors work to give the illusion of reality to the stage. I have yet to see the George M. Cohan play, the William Collier play or the Louis Mann play that is not constituted mainly by business.

The aim of the actor generally is more to prolong emotion than to reproduce life. Mack Sennett splendidly illustrated this by citing the case of the comedian who is pushed into the

² This business is always developed. A second mosquito lands on the valet's face, and the master sees it and is about to repeat the friendly act, when the valet begs him with an agonized voice to let the mosquito live. A milder form of the same business is in "Still Waters Run Deep," where a wasp is killed on the face of the sleeping Mildmay with a knotted handkerchief.

lake. The audience gets all the fun there is in it as soon as the comedian loses his balance. Therefore, Mr. Sennett stopped the man as soon as he neared the water, and brought him back to an upright position on the bank, thereby winning a second laugh.³ The actor who picks up an old man's gouty foot and strokes it to prove his sympathy, and then, when the patient cries out with pain, hastily drops the foot to the floor making the old man shriek louder, is applying this very principle. The dramatic value of prolonging emotion I already have discussed.

The border-line of propriety in business may be overstepped very easily. For the moment I can think of no better way of demonstrating this point than by taking one very delicate bit of business that has been admirably done, and showing how it might have been made offensive by further development. I refer to that scene in David Belasco's stage play "The Return of Peter Grimm," where the lawyer, the minister, and the doctor are grouped about the fire listening to the reading of Peter's will by Peter's nephew. All are expanding on the subject of Peter's virtues in expectation of substantial bequests. "To my old friend," reads the nephew, quoting the deceased florist and naming the lawyer, "I give my most treasured possession—my mother's prayer-book." And the prayer-book is forthwith handed to the attorney, who is fairly writhing with disgust. Most producers other than Belasco would have had the outraged lawyer throw the book into the fire. Belasco does not. It would have been excess business, and dangerous business. It may be added, also that by making it a prayer-book rather than some other object that he could have thrown away, the actor's opportunity to show emotion was vastly increased.

FINDING LITTLE FACTS

IF THE question of where one may find facts for amplification of scenes, for interpretation of story, has arisen in your mind, doubtless by this time you also have guessed the answer. You obtain them by following out clues, just as the actor in

³ Article in *The Saturday Evening Post* late in 1916.

Price's play was led to imitation of a jockey and production of a poker chip. In other words you develop associated ideas.

It is impossible to "invent" material, of course. Psychologists have made it clear that the human mind may conceive only parallels with the facts of human experience, that we may "create" only new combinations from what we personally already have experienced or know from the experience of others.⁴ Therefore, in working out the interpretation of your story facts, search your memory, or your notes or your library or actual locations for the circumstances that appropriately *might* surround those facts.

The environment suggests the story as the story suggests the environment. W. T. Price said in his "Philosophy of Dramatic Principle and Method" that: "Characters are formed for their association with the actual topography, modified by the architecture and many things involving habit and point of view. The mountaineer could not well do without his altitudes and perspectives. The cotton field is the conventional expression of Southern life, and, in short, many actions could take place in but one locality; and certain characters and moods of thought are to be found there only." Conceive, therefore, from all the clues available, the story and its associated ideas, and you will not lack material for interpretation of the facts.

Flaubert used to send his protégé, Guy de Maupassant, out for a quiet walk; and then, out of the observations the young man brought back, would show him how to utilize them in stories. Maupassant later prided himself on *not* having invented stories; he described only what he had seen. Emerson said somewhere, "The air is full of sounds; the sky of tokens; the ground is all memoranda and signatures; and every object is covered over with hints which speak to the intelligent." Indeed, when the apparently external facts to be developed

⁴ Said the ancient Philostratus: "Imagination, a wiser craftsmistress than Imitation, has done this; for Imitation will fashion what she sees, but Imagination what she has not seen, for she will *suppose* it according to the analogy of the real. Moreover, sudden disturbance will put Imitation's hand out, but not Imagination's for she goes on undisturbed to what she herself hypothetically conceived."—George Saintsbury, "A History of Criticism," Vol. 1. This matter is discussed at length in Chapter XL of the present work—"The World of Ideas."

in this manner are not at least suggested, a story seems incomplete. They are motives in themselves. The tales of Marie-Henri Beyle (Stendhal) are striking cases in point. Critic after critic remarked that his characters were untrue to life because of their abstraction. "The landscape, the climate, the time of day, the weather—Nature herself, in other words," said Emil Zola, "never seems to intervene and exert an influence on his characters." Commenting then on a scene in Stendhal's "Rouge et Noir," Zola continued: "Give that episode to an author for whom the *milieu* exists, and he will make the night, with its odors, its voices, its soft voluptuousness, play a part in the defeat of the woman. And that author will be in the right; his picture will be more complete."

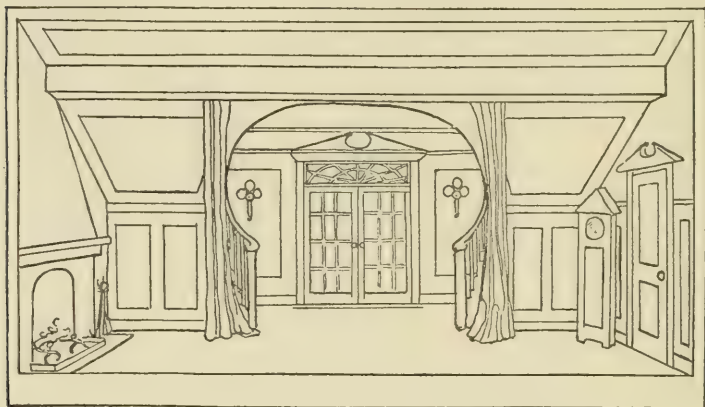
SCENERY

I HAVE said comparatively little—and that little very widely scattered—about scenery. This may be surprising because scenery, whether literal or impressionistic, is so conspicuous a part of the theater and for the latest two or three decades has been so prolific a source of critical discussion. As a matter of fact, beyond a few externals of the subject, the dramatist has had little need to consider scenery until now. And even now he need not concern himself too seriously about it because the detailed handling of paint and canvas is properly intrusted to specialists.⁵

The so-called "practical" considerations of scenery and of the stage as a whole, usually simmer down to matters of expense. There could be a huge crowd of supers in the mob scene if the manager could afford it; or the interior of the Taj Mahal might be reproduced in detail if there were enough Hindus interested in seeing that marvelous mausoleum upon the stage. That is to say, expense not merely to produce but to maintain profitably. For if the public will pay for tons of scenery, the technical departments of stage production will outdo themselves to make it available. Florenz Ziegfeld

⁵For one wanting further information here, I suggest "The American Theatre Manuals" series, including my own book, "Equipment For Stage Production" (New York, 1928). See also the recommendations in Chapter XXXVII of the present work.

thus felt amply justified by the tremendous personal popularity of Leon Errol to spend something like \$230,000 for the curtain to rise the first time on "Looie the Fourteenth" at the Cosmopolitan Theater, New York.



AN AUTHOR'S SKETCH TO VISUALIZE HIS SETTING

From a play by the present writer. I have found that such sketches not only promote ease of writing but that they also help the playreader and the manager to visualize the action. Consequently, when my play is finished, I have the sketches photographed down to the size of my manuscript page and paste prints in each copy. The above sample is, of course, intended to fit the circumstances of a particular action; but it shows how a simple setting may be devised for pictorial variety. In the middle of the act in which it is used, the curtains are closed between the stairs, lighting is altered to correspond, and it becomes to all intents and purposes, a new scene.

What I am getting at is that if the dramatist has a play that justifies elaborate scenic investiture, he need not worry about precisely how it is to be provided. Maeterlinck proved that when he called for the unheard-of transformations and other huge spectacular effects in his "The Blue Bird" and "The Betrothal" without even suggesting how they might be done. At the same time, unless the dramatist has proved the correctness of his judgment by earlier productions, he will show commendable discretion by being moderate in his stage demands.

Elaborate settings are expensive to design, to build, to dress, to light, to transport, and to keep in repair. If a submitted play seems effective without requiring heavy produc-

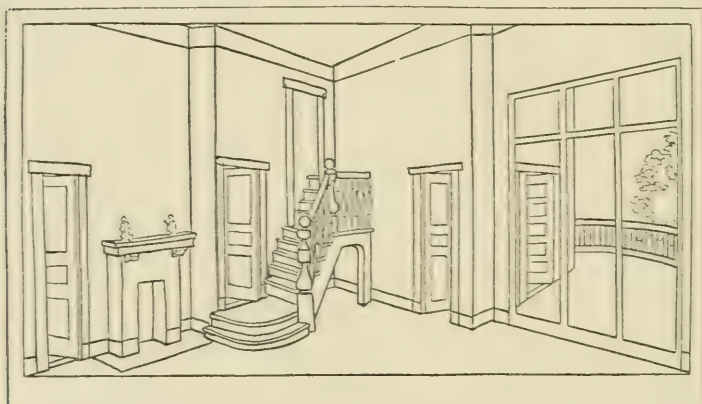
tion expense—if used scenery may be resurrected from the storehouse to fit it—the manager naturally will be more disposed to take it than if the reverse is true. On which account the new writer will be wise to curb the extravagance of his scenic imagination. A play with a single setting throughout, like that of Vincent Lawrence's charming comedy, "In Love With Love," or of "Minick," by George Kaufman and Edna Ferber, thus enjoys an obvious advantage—although a manager pointed out to me not long ago that a stage play with a single set is usually of little value for its motion picture rights.

To economize in settings the dramatist tries first of all to find some place that will serve as a common meeting-place for all his characters concerned. This accounts for the popularity of the living-room as a stage scene. Take that of "The Return of Peter Grimm." It shows a door leading outside, door to the cellar, door to the dining-room, stairs leading to an upper, mezzanine balcony with doors therefrom to bedrooms. In exterior settings, the dooryard finds favor. It is used by Augustus Thomas in at least one act of "The Copperhead" and by Zona Gale in "Miss Lulu Bett."

Generally speaking the interior setting is somewhat safer for the new playwright. Miss Edith Ellis, well-known stage director and dramatist, once told me that she never had known a play in which all the action was supposed to occur outdoors, to succeed financially. There is lovely "Prunella," by Laurence Housman and Granville Barker, the entire action of which occurs in a formal English garden completely enclosed by tall hedges; but certainly it must be admitted that "Prunella" established no box-office records. There is also Louis N. Parker's "Pomander Walk." The reason assigned by Miss Ellis is partly inherent in the type of setting, which tends to silhouette characters against the sky (unless backed by something like "Prunella's" hedges, or the adjoining houses in 'Pomander Walk' " to throw them into relief), and so to obscure their facial expressions. It is also partly psychological, because, as Miss Ellis explained, we never really feel that we know a person till we see him indoors. On this account Miss Ellis believed that characters should be *introduced* to the

audience in an interior setting whenever possible. In her production work, she said, when she found herself obliged to introduce a character for the first time outdoors, she always endeavored to do so against some close background—an arbor, for instance. "Get acquainted with your character in intimate surroundings," she told me, "and thereafter, even if you see him far away from you, up in a balloon, perhaps, you can recognize him and say, 'O yes; I know that fellow. Bill Jones—a nice chap.'"

I have had occasion to verify that bit of wisdom many times. And not so long ago, re-reading Edgar Allan Poe's "Philosophy of Composition" in which he details his method in writing "The Raven,"⁶ I was interested to note that the author at first considered making the locale of his poem the forest or the field, but discarded that idea because: "it has



SCENIC VARIETY IN A ONE-SET PLAY

Another sketch from one of my own plays, in this case a setting intended to stand throughout the action. It is unusually rich in opportunities for pictorial change all used and definitely required by the action. It has at one and the same time upstairs and down, indoors and out. It makes possible lighting from within and without. As a "V-shaped interior" it gives interesting glimpses through doors and window. It may be noted also that the half-stairway suggests the second floor without requiring extraordinary height in the setting as a whole.

⁶ In this very remarkable paper Poe said, "It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable to either accident or intuition; that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem."

always appeared to me that a close *circumscription of space* [the italics are his] is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident: it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place."

If it is practicable for the dramatist to employ but a single setting for his entire play, he must be careful to choose one interesting enough in its detail not to seem lacking in pictorial variety as the play goes on. This is accomplished sometimes by affording opportunities in the movement of the play itself, to catch glimpses into adjoining places. For instance, the aforementioned living-room in "Minick" sometimes shows the outer hall, the dining-room, the hallway to the kitchen and bathroom and through the window the city skyline—all woven naturally into the action.

The producer sometimes does his bit by working a wealth of detail into the single setting so that no matter how intently the audience examines it there will always be something new and interesting to discover. Belasco has carried this so far that he frequently has been censured for overloading the scene. It is observable, however, that Belasco, being author as well as producer, usually makes these details serve story purpose as well. In "The Return of Peter Grimm" Marta winds the clock; Kathrien plays the piano; the bid for Peter's business comes over the telephone; the old Bible is the medium through which the family history of the Grimms is revealed; the hat-rack becomes a symbol of the departed spirit; Peter's pipe, breaking on the floor, is the first clue to his death; and so the action cares for countless details throughout this fine work of a master-craftsman.

It is when the occasion for using details of the setting is provided by the play itself that we may say that characters belong to the *milieu*. There is no set rule that may be given about how this is to be done in all cases. It is one other matter for the nice judgment of the dramatist himself. But the method is indicated. The common meeting-place is found by the dramatist; he creates and uses its advantages in his play; and he tries to provide variety in it, if it is just one set-

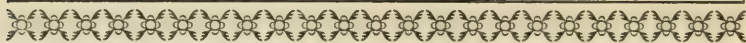
ting throughout, or if the same setting is used again after a lapse, by putting slip-covers on the furniture for a season's change, parting portières that previously hid inner nooks and otherwise diverting the easily tired eye of the spectator.

He would be a poor dramatist who would not endeavor to tell his story with all the means available. He would be equally at fault if he did not endeavor to inject, within the limitations of reasonableness, added attractiveness. Producers feel the need of this keenly, and will insist upon, for instance, feminine interest in a play, even when the material will not consistently permit. The cry is, "Something for Everybody;" and I must admit its justification. It is splendid to be able to provide an entertainment in which there is something for parents, something for lovers, something for children, something for men, something for women and so on. Pile up the riches. In Sir Gilbert Parker's "The Right of Way," picturized for Bert Lytell, the story was that of a man's redemption. Strictly speaking, it had no important feminine interest. Yet, a feminine interest was provided throughout, and with exceeding adroitness. A romantic flavor was maintained without destroying consistency when the hero died at the end (this being necessary to prove to him that there is an after-life and a God), by having several different women successively in love with him and he with them, but none of them with him long enough for the audience to form a marked preference and so to build up expectations.

When Edgar Selwyn and Aubrey Kennedy collaborated to give Mabel Normand one of her early Goldwyn starring vehicles, "Dodging a Million," they deliberately began by setting down the broad qualities they wanted to offer the public. I do not recall the details, but the list went something like this: Money, pretty clothes, beautiful settings, heart interest, mystery, thrills. George Loane Tucker, who directed the play when the 'script was completed, provided the qualities just as deliberately.

Which is all very well when it may be done consistently. But if the purpose of the play must be warped to make room for these injected elements, I say quickly and emphatically, "Throw them out!" One cannot develop a romance between

Columbus and Isabella; neither may Columbus bid a touching farewell to his wife and children, who were miles away, when he sails from Palos off into the Sea of Darkness; nor yet may an undisguised, stalwart, handsome matinée idol play the sickly James Wolfe at the fall of Quebec in 1759.



CHAPTER XXIII

PROPORTION

IT IS apparent that I am applying to the subject of translation of the story facts into terms of drama, all that has been said in earlier pages about what drama should be. If the dramatist has learned thoroughly the requirements of interest on the part of the audience, he will have no trouble at this point, or, indeed, at any other point to follow. And yet this is not as simple as it looks, for each new application of a principle employs a different process of reasoning difficult to anticipate. For instance, the use of the principle of retardation in dialogue is something that really calls for further explanation.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE PARTS

THE facts that expand the scene, that sustain the emotion, obviously should also contribute to the whole story. Over-elaboration of trivial scenes necessarily will throw them out of all proportion in the greater scheme. The play action must be kept going. To hold up the story in order to demonstrate a character's generosity, for instance, is wrong; the fact should be woven in with the smooth course of events. This pitfall is not easily avoided. A small, new idea occurring to a dramatist while he is working out the action of a play, sometimes will fill his horizon like a rocket bursting with stars; only the lapse of several weeks will restore his perspective where he can see that the new idea is but an incident in his entire work. Hartley Manners once cautioned young dramatists about the danger of stalling the action with profusion of ideas.¹

¹ Interview in *The New York Press*, Dec. 7, 1913.

"When a young playwright is fairly bursting with eagerness to give the world his idea," said Manners, "he will halt his play for an interminable period while he makes one character preach this idea. A playwright should never preach. Let him show conditions. For instance, in 'The House Next Door,' I made no attempt to have Jacobson extol the virtues of the Jews, when he might very plausibly and humanly have done so after many insults had been heaped on him by his Gentile neighbors. I made him act out his character by putting it to visible test. He showed gentleness and tact; he didn't preach them. He showed love of his neighbor; he didn't preach it. And not merely did he show these qualities on the stage, but he often showed them in actual dramatic conflict with the other protagonists of the play. Why do young dramatists never seem to learn this simple principle of having moral or intellectual theses acted and not talked about in a play? Think of the power and eloquence of Galsworthy's 'Justice,' gained for the most part by the almost elementary expedient of showing both sides without comment."

This is a favorite method of Galsworthy's, employed still more strikingly in another of his fine plays, "Strife." He discusses it in a valuable essay, "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama," in *The Fortnightly Review* (London, 1909). With all respect for the effort of any writer to present his facts "without bias," however, it must be realized that he cannot avoid putting forward an opinion. Despite his earnestly professed detachment, Galsworthy never fails to convey his opinion by having his audience deduce it for themselves from the selected material he has seen fit to present.

There must be a forward movement of story even in the little scenes. The simple opposition by which the succession of incidents is worked out, partakes of the character of proposition by its automatic progression; the spectator is made constantly to want to know more; two principles are struggling for supremacy, and the audience wants one of these to win. Interest certainly is strongest where there is an opposition of ideas culminating in victory for one side or the other. This implies, once more, the conflict of right and wrong, and it obliges us, by extension, to admit that much of the zest of

life would be gone without an element of Evil for Right to fight.

I have said this before. Several days after stating then my doubt that a thoroughly interesting play might be made out of a condition of unalloyed happiness, I chanced to read a confirmation in a New York newspaper. According to the story, a teacher was impressing her pupils with the importance of being kind, but failed to reach one boy. "Wouldn't it be a wonderful world," she persisted, "if everybody was kind to everybody else?" The boy considered once more and then decided it wouldn't—because, he explained, there couldn't then be any more Mutt and Jeff cartoons. The opposition of ideas is not obliged to conclude with Mutt being hit in the head by a brick with Jeff's compliments, but it really should be there.

DISSECTING THE SCENE

CONCENTRATION of the audience's attention on one side of the conflict, whatever it may be, suggests the matter of simplification of all material. We expand plot; we elaborate episodes; we add to incidents—yet it must not be forgotten that a spectator, a human being, gives attention best to one thing at a time. Hence the action is carefully planned as a succession of single facts, a sort of torch race, in which the interest is kindled from one fact to the next. Trained actors are scrupulous about this. When one is conducting a scene, the others stand still, or in all events, occupy themselves with business that does not distract. There is only one active spot *at a time* in the well-written scene. It leads and holds the eye; and meanwhile nothing else bids for attention.

Just a moment ago—it is late at night—I heard a strange sound among the trees under my window. I listened, but a number of papers on my table occupied my eye and divided my attention. I snapped my light out, and at once was able to hear better. In the darkness, I could throw all my faculties toward the one object. Another example of the concentration of attention came to me recently through a letter printed in the New York *Evening World*. The writer entered a little store run by a very old lady. While the old

lady was waiting on him the telephone rang. She answered, and then requested the party at the other end to wait until she put on her glasses. This done, the old lady picked up the receiver again and said, "All right now. What were you saying?" And proceeded with the conversation to which she then gave her complete attention. Probably in her case, the vain effort of her failing eyes to focus on any object, distracted her mind from attention through her ears.

It doubtless will seem strange to you at first reading that I wanted to blot out the appeal to my eyes in order to listen, and that the old lady wanted to sharpen hers to do the same thing; but I feel satisfied that both instances really prove my point about attention being keenest when all the faculties are focused to the same point, and I am sure that psychologists could provide ample explanation to support it. You cannot successfully hold attention on more than one object at a time. The unit may be an individual, or it may be a group; but the impression given forth in either case should be single.

"BACKSTITCHING"

THE important observation to which the foregoing is mere preparation, has to do with the means by which the successive single incidents are linked together to form the chain of interest that is to make the action continuous. Each incident, as we have seen, consists of a main line of interest with flashes of a lesser line cut into it. That is, it is constituted by two elements, one of which is the story, the other being altogether to strengthen that. The succeeding incident also must consist of two elements, major and minor. Now, handling an individual incident is comparatively easy; but how, if we must keep the action single, are we going to drop one incident and pick up another without breaking the interest completely? If we try to overlap the end of the first incident and the beginning of the second, we will have four elements bidding for attention; and this certainly must result in confusion.

So it seems; but the fact is that you will overlap two elements and not four. The lesser lines of interest, the "flash"

material, you do not consider here; the major lines of interest are all that overlap. Just before the interest is about to die through completion of the first incident, a preparatory bit of the second incident is introduced to lift the audience's interest afresh. This is the device that I call "backstitching" for want of a more expressive term. No matter what it is called, the introductory flash, cut into the close of a waning incident to hint at new complication, is of great assistance in making action continuous and cumulative within the sequence.

For illustrations of dramatic backstitching return to the description I already have given of the opening action of "The Gateway to the West." The pioneer family is barely started on its way when we glimpse the Frenchmen and Indians gliding along the river below. Then we come to the pioneers halting to cut some brush entanglements. The backstitching is done. We are able to drop the pioneers now and dwell a bit with the French party. The members of this hear the chopping, and turn in to shore to investigate. The pioneer story is no longer the major line of interest, but only flash material for the French. The French Indians now carry their story to a point where they are about to kill off the pioneers. But here we glimpse a new party of white men and Indians passing through the woods. The French Indians hear them coming and hide. Backstitching again. Now we are ready to pick up sustained action for the new party. The French element dwindles in its turn to flash material for the major interest of the Virginia officer identified as an adjutant-general of militia.

The transition from incident to incident should never be abrupt. There always should be a reason for the preparatory flash of the action to come. The glimpse of the English officer and his party is given just in the nick of time to prevent the French Indians from ending the action by killing the pioneers, just as the glimpse of the French party gliding along the river gave the spectator something to look forward to when he saw the pioneer train going over the ridge. I know of no better earmark of the experienced picture craftsman than the ability to use this backstitching device smoothly.

To a person who has not studied the device of backstitch-

ing, it must seem very "jumpy" in its movement as I tell about it. As a matter of fact, the aroused emotion of an audience always has a certain momentum; and the backstitching is done so quickly that the spectator has bridged the connection before he can realize the slight jerkiness that unquestionably exists. It is painfully apparent here because I have arrested it to explain it to you. We must remember that when the play is on, the action flows swiftly and is very different from its look on a printed page.

RECALLING THE PLOT²

IN WORKING at such close range there again rises the danger of forgetting the great plan of the whole story. The audience must not lose the thread of story. Graham Baker, one-time scenario editor of Vitagraph, who has done yeoman service writing continuities for serial pictures, once found himself in a story situation very much involved. It was a detective yarn; and at this particular stage the action was all in one house, with principals moving about simultaneously in different rooms. Baker had an inspiration. He wrote his dilemma into the story. "I figured that if the complication bothered me," he explained later, "it would confuse the audience too. So I had the detective, also puzzled, sit down and draw a diagram of the house and thus summarize the relationships of the persons and the 'geography' of their positions."

Baker told me about this after I had expressed my admiration for the manner, in his serials, in which every now and then the whole situation would be pictured simultaneously in one frame, so that the audience never lost the main idea. You would see the hero trying to escape with the heroine, whom he had rescued, through the narrow gorge; and at the same time in the same actual picture "frame," you would see the pursuing bandits riding along the dangerous trail above them. This device was employed, in one form or another, at intervals throughout the action. In an exceedingly effective way, it was Hartley Manners's recommendation to "repeat the plot" demonstrated in practice.

Picturize the situation as well as the scene. Over stretches

² See also "Plot Summary" in Chapter XIV of the present work.

of minor complication in a play, the dramatist should contrive to remind the audience of the main struggle so they won't lose sight of it. Beside, a scene that is self-explanatory is necessarily much more forceful than one requiring the audience to take into account various antecedent circumstances. We like the scene in the old play in which the heroine is rescued by the hero from the sawmill conveyer upon which she has been placed by the villain, largely because it is the entire situation objectively presented, with no elements absent or vitally dependent upon off-stage conditions.

This matter of proportion and emphasis is but one consideration for the dramatist who has stepped back to regain his perspective. Another important act is to make sure that what has been done is humanly true. If the author would conceive the situation of his play as existing actually in his own family or circle of friends, and meet it honestly as he, himself, might meet it in real life, artificialities of structure and treatment almost certainly would be exposed, and he might then correct them.

In the first draft there will be grievous faults, such as the distortion of most of the play to justify some presumably "big scene;" and there will be small ones, such as the old expedient of having two characters tell each other information they already know, for the benefit of the audience. The dramatist will have to correct them all, and his next 'script will be correspondingly better. In the end he will be compensated by having a play that will interest more, and hence earn more; and if he has put his best into it, he may be rewarded not only on earth but in heaven.



PART EIGHT

MAKING READY

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PLAY BEGINS

SEVERAL years ago a well-known dramatic critic who had written constructively about the manner in which most motion pictures insult public intelligence, was induced to prepare a continuity¹ for an equally well-known director. They hied themselves to a quiet room, discarded their coats and collars, and went to work. While the director paced the floor the critic began clicking his typewriter. The director stopped suspiciously. "What are you writing?" said he. "Just 'Scene One, iris in,'" was the reply; "and now, if you'll tell me where to begin, we're off."

Continuities are not written that way, of course. The adapter may begin with the middle or the end; and he doesn't think immediately afterward about scene numbers or camera tricks. Nevertheless, the critic asked a legitimate question, for the most experienced dramatist sooner or later encounters the problem of where to start the story.

SIMPLE NARRATIVE

THE obvious way to begin a play, the way most novelists entering the field do, is to follow the simple chronological order of facts. This is so easy, and to a degree so effective, that the natural inference is that dramatic art is child's play. If the mountain feud which is to obstruct the union of the hill-billy

¹ The working scenario used by the director and his aides in producing a motion picture.

and the daughter of the revenue officer, began fifty years ago when Grand-daddy Slote upset the sour mash of Great-uncle Doody's whisky-still, nothing is more reasonable, apparently, than to begin the story there. This method has produced some very interesting dramas; yet, it is only truthful to state that had they been more compact, they might have been very, very much more effective.

I do not intend to amplify the reasons why it is better to start a story as close as possible to the precipitating act of its proposition. Foregoing pages have demonstrated at length that complete emotional interest goes with the wide-open issue, and that all prior to that issue is mere "planting" for it and therefore should be got out of the way as soon as possible. Furthermore, I have illustrated the manner in which a situation may be taken "close to the hilt;" and although that demonstration applied particularly to a sequence, it may, by easy extension, be made to fit the play as a whole. It is assumed at this point that principles dictating how to stake off the boundaries of the play proper have been made clear. What I want to discuss are certain difficulties to be encountered after that roughing-out has been done.

The reader doubtless agrees with the ancient recommendation to start the play in the midst of events, *in medias res*; its good sense is patent. The trouble is that if one begins there, how on earth is he to put over the various circumstances that happened before? There must have been earlier circumstances, or this crisis, in this compelling scene selected for the opening of the play—say the collision of two automobiles—could not have arisen. There must have been circumstances, however trivial, leading up to it. If these circumstances must be known to the audience in order properly to affix responsibility for the accident, the facts certainly cannot be ignored. Their chronological order being upset by opening *in medias res*, where are they to be placed?

ANTECEDENT FACTS

PROBABLY there never has been a play situation, important enough to motivate an action of two hours or more, that has

not involved material in retrospect.² Plays that have few antecedent facts—or “conditions precedent” as Price called them—are almost invariably those that are told in “narrative,” or strictly chronological order. This condition is symptomatic of a loose, long-drawn-out structure. On the other hand, the more compact a dramatic action is, the more antecedent facts it will have. Wherefore it is not surprising that the plays of Ibsen, which are probably more economically made than those of any other standard writer, are exceptionally complex in events before the curtain rises. During my student period I found in Ibsen’s “Little Eyolf” approximately ninety-six facts that were supposed to have transpired in the intervals between acts or before the play opened. This extraordinary number had to be established, of course, in the action proper; and the smoothness with which Ibsen worked them in is splendid proof of his mastery of his craft.³ A vast amount of antecedent facts almost invariably makes the opening action of a play a bit slow in starting; but this is equally true of a heavy locomotive which, although ponderous at first, has tremendous momentum where momentum is most needed.

That the dramatist will have to weave antecedent facts into the opening of his play is inevitable. If he has any sense of the dramatic at all, he is bound to meet this obligation. He cannot conscientiously begin his story *all* the way back. If he goes far back, he inevitably will find facts lacking in interest when considered for their own sake, although he will realize that if they might be seen by the audience in the light of their future importance, they would increase in dramatic value at once.

Until September 6, 1901, the details of the life of the young Pole, Leon Czolgosz, were of no interest whatever to the great public; but after that day, when he assassinated William McKinley, everything in his morbid existence ac-

² In composing the “Ring” tetralogy, Wagner began with an opera, “Siegfried’s Death,” but found that the story needed a preliminary drama to explain it. This in turn needed another, and that again required still another before it.

³ Counting antecedent facts seems at first like a rather senseless procedure; but I recommend it heartily for a student who desires to become really impressed with principles of compactness.

quired world news value. The visitor to the British Museum may have the most casual interest in a certain fossil specimen of a winged lizard; but if he is shown that its scales are rudimentary feathers, and told that this ugly archæopteryx is, in a manner of speaking, the reptilian ancestor of our most beautiful birds, he certainly will look again. Surely these instances point to the fact that the chronological order of facts sometimes may be altered to advantage. In other words, start the play with an interesting event, and then introduce the intrinsically small points from which it arose, because in that reverse natural order they may be worth looking at.

"FADEBACKS"

THIS truth was discovered quite early in the development of motion picture method. To open the play with a striking incident, then fade back ⁴ to the commonplace events that led up to it, then fade out on these and pick up the story where it was broken off, became a standard practice. Objections arose, however, chiefly that the play hung fire while the dramatist went back and explained. It was awkward storytelling. Better means were devised to overcome the difficulty; and now the term "fadeback" has virtually disappeared from the studios. Incidentally, any extended action in "retrospect" now is frowned upon for the same reason.

The improved method of handling antecedent facts merely introduces them in smaller doses—an interesting scene, a little past information, more story, more explanation. The old way was to lump all the bygone stuff, to startle the audience at the outset with a "punch," which is to say, "a smashing, big situation," and then, while the dazed spectators were slowly recovering from the shock, to throw at their heads great chunks of dry, uninteresting material. With that out of the way, the dramatist would then launch into his story proper and carry it with reasonable smoothness to the end.

⁴ The term "fadeback" is used ordinarily to mean merely a repetition of action that the audience already has seen. For instance, the action already has shown the wastrel being warned that unless he mends his ways he will become an outcast; and, now that he is an outcast, he recollects the warning, and the picture "fades back" to the scene that is in his mind.

There are observers in the field of motion pictures, as there have been for centuries in that of the stage, who see only the superficials of playmaking devices. Many of these have noticed that the more successful photoplay opens with an arresting incident. They evidently have decided that that is all there is to it. It does not occur to them that the striking opening action bears very definite relationship to the explanatory matter that follows it; in their opinion the "punch" opening contains all the magic.

Many evidences of their conception might be given, but I think particularly of one, "Life or Honor?", a Leah Baird feature produced by Ivan Abramson and released for state rights buyers in the spring of 1918. The action of this melodrama begins with a night scene showing an unknown man horror-stricken as he witnesses a murder silhouetted on a window-shade across the way from the bedroom of some beautiful disrobed lady who may or may not be his wife. I state it all in one sentence because the material was given in a similar jumble on the screen. This is dropped abruptly without explanation of who these persons are, with the single exception of an unsupported subtitle giving the identity of the murdered man; and the action then begins all over again. Temporarily extraneous events that led up to the murder are slowly developed. When the time comes to show the murder, all the circumstances are given save those with which the play opened; and of these the spectator naturally has only a hazy recollection. Nevertheless, the action which now follows the murder, in its rightful place, depends mainly on what the horror-stricken man witnessed, because his testimony will clear an innocent man accused of the crime.⁵ Virtually everything becomes a hopeless mess so far as intelligent interest is concerned, and this in the main because the

⁵ I cannot forego adding that the court testimony given by "the horror-stricken man" is that the arm of the murderer which he saw in silhouette on the window-shade, was brown, this proving to the twelve honest men and true in the jury-box that the real criminal is a rascally Filipino valet. Now, it may be that the director had the shade blow a little in the wind and so reveal the murderer's arm rather than its shadow; but my impression, which was rigorously questioned by myself immediately after viewing the film, was unqualifiedly that all that the witness saw was the shadow. How the deuce he could tell the color of the murderer's skin from that is a poser that even Sam Lloyd can't answer.

director, the producer, the star, or the film editor, or perhaps the office-boy, snipped a hundred feet or so from the "big moment" of the play and pasted it on at the opening.

An antecedent fact almost invariably is a cause, which is to say a motive, of an effect in the play itself. It is of value to note that the interesting introduction of antecedent facts usually reverses the natural succession of cause and effect, giving the effect first to compel interest in the cause which is next supplied. The order of facts in the action proper, however, is in the main the regular order of cause and effect. To give the effect first and then explain its cause, gives the appearance of coincidence; and while coincidences after the precipitating act of the major proposition, are never convincing, a coincidence before that act is acceptable to the audience because the early portion of the play is all circumstances out of which the action proper grows.

HOW STAGE PLAYS DO IT

IN STAGE plays the bulk of antecedent material is conveyed in spoken words. During Shakespeare's time, and for some decades before and after, the common practice was to have a symbolical figure appear before the action started, and carefully explain the events that happened before the dramatist took up the story. About 1588, the year of the Armada, Christopher Marlowe began his famous play "Faustus" with such a figure speaking these lines:

Only this, gentlemen,—we must perform
The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad:
To patient judgments we appeal for plaud,
And speak for Faustus in his infancy.
Now is he born, his parents base of stock,
In Germany, within a town call'd Rhodes:
Of riper years, to Wittenberg he went,
Whereas his kinsmen chiefly brought him up.
So soon he profits in divinity,
The fruitful plot of scholarism grac'd
That shortly he was grac'd with doctor's name.
Excelling all whose sweet disputes delight

In heavenly matters of theology;
Till swoln with cunning, of a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And melting, heavens conspired his overthrow;
For, falling to a devilish exercise,
And glutted now with learning's golden gifts,
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy;
Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss:
And this the man that in his study sits.

The play forthwith opened with Faustus seated in his study. This typical practice was succeeded by a device whereby the first character on the scene was given a monologue, of which one of the finest examples is the beginning of "Richard III" where the Duke of Gloster utters the famous soliloquy beginning, "Now is the winter of our discontent." Shylock's first soliloquy in "The Merchant of Venice," "How like a fawning publican he looks!" is much better dramatically because it is developed out of preceding action and in itself is a self-portrait of the usurer, who is expressing only his emotional reaction to the introduction of Antonio. In the middle of the last century these noble figures had assumed the form of a voluble maid who dusted the furniture of the first setting as she confided to the audience all the necessary information about the persons who were legitimately to occupy it. When monologues went out of fashion, two servants told each other about the antecedent material, usually already known to both but recited for the benefit of the audience.⁶

The two conventional servants easily became any two characters; and by degrees the rank and file of dramatists became more dexterous in covering their tracks. I am referring now

⁶ Sheridan could not resist a thrust at this. In "The Critic," Puff's tragedy in rehearsal introduces Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Christopher Hatton telling each other a vast amount of information which each already knows very well. Dangle interrupts to ask Puff why it is that they do anything so illogical. Puff responds, "But the audience aren't supposed to know anything of the matter, are they?" And when Dangle persists that there is no reason why Sir Walter should be so communicative, Puff indignantly exclaims, "Fore Gad, now that's one of the most ungrateful observations I ever heard—for the less inducement he has to tell all this, the more I think you ought to be obliged to him."

to the broad practice; there always were a few dramatists who handled their expositions of precedent conditions skillfully. In the early seventeenth century Thomas Kyd employed the celebrated "letter device" in his "Spanish Tragedie." Hieronimo has a soliloquy in which he longs to avenge the murder of his son. Then we have the stage direction, "a letter fall-eth." Hieronimo exclaims:

What's heere? a letter? Tush, it is not so!

A letter written to Hieronimo.

(Reads) "For want of incke receiue this bloudie writ"

and from what follows, the audience gathers the name of the murderer and the details of his crime—matters vital to the understanding of subsequent action.

The first consideration for presenting antecedent material in this frank way, is to provide a motive for offering it. The information is intended for the audience, of course; but the audience would much prefer to overhear one character telling it to another than to be given it directly. See how Shakespeare, in "The Tempest," brings out Ariel's previous history by having Prospero chide that spirit for ingratitude. See in the same play how a quarrel affords the occasion for reviewing the life of Caliban. Notice how each party to the quarrel presents part of that review. There is emotion to it. Caliban is forced to admit Prospero's charge against him; the audience is invited and enabled to form its own conclusions.

Examine the entire exposition of this marvelous play. See how compact it all is, and yet how thoroughly motivated. The action starts with the storm-tossed ship driving upon the rocks, which certainly is a thrilling start. From there we go to the island, before the cell of Prospero, where we learn that this commanding figure is the presiding genius of this storm raised by his magic. We see his gentle daughter, Miranda, pleading for the unfortunate mariners; and this gives Prospero reason to explain to her why he loosed the elements upon the strangers. Everything is motivated. Because Prospero, in his early manhood, spent his time in study and left his brother to attend to affairs of state, the misfortunes of

his career began; because of that, antecedent circumstances of the play developed thus and so. The wizard continues:

Hear a little further,
And then I'll bring thee to the present business
Which now's upon us; without the which, this story
Were most impertinent.

There is a constant play of emotion, back and forth; and in the swell of it the exposition is worked out.

A quarrel between a Montague and a Capulet affords the reason for reviewing the antecedent history in the beginning of "Romeo and Juliet;" a quarrel of another kind, between Orlando and Oliver, opens "As You Like It."

PROLOGUES AND EPILOGUES

For fullness of record something must be added here about those irregularities called the prologue and the epilogue—acted divisions of the play occurring respectively at beginning and end, but sufficiently outside the main action not to be strictly parts of it.

The purely conventional prologue, the little prefatory speech that introduced the usual play of a century and more ago (and that has been affected somewhat in recent seasons by producers of vaudevilles and revues), is not the sort now in mind. In the circumstances of the modern theater these literary exercises have small point, however usefully they may have served in olden times to quiet turbulent, unmanageable audiences and disposed them favorably toward the play. On the whole, these may be referred to the antiquarian department for more expert attention.

As far as I am able to discover there are no precise dramatic definitions of the words prologue and epilogue—that is, nothing accurately to define their separateness from the body of the action. A worthy effort has been made to establish their good sense, however, by George Pierce Baker who, in his "Dramatic Technique,"⁷ remarks several varying instances that seem legitimately entitled to the names. There is the

⁷ Especially pp. 145-148.

sort which is a frame to the picture, illustrated by the prologue and epilogue of *Sly, the Tinker*, between which is acted Shakespeare's "*Taming of the Shrew*," and by the opening and close of Edward Sheldon's "*Romance*," which presents first the conditions in which the Bishop tells his grandson his own love-story which is the play proper, and then what the grandson does as a result of hearing it. There is also the sort of prologue and epilogue which shows in action antecedent and subsequent facts that, by this method, so strengthen the effectiveness of the body of the play, that no reasonable person would want to do without them. Professor Baker cites in this connection the prologue to "*A Celebrated Case*," which enables the audience to share fully in Adrienne's emotions when she recognizes her father in the convict.

Prologues and epilogues in the dramatic sense, are so distinctly not arbitrary divisions, are so easy to recognize in their structural relationships as separate parts that cannot be called acts, that Professor Baker wonders if more definite terms cannot be found for them, himself suggesting "*Induction*" and "*Finale*." The existing terms unquestionably are much abused. Jerome K. Jerome describes his beautiful play "*The Passing of the Third Floor Back*" as "*An Idle Fancy in a Prologue, an Act and an Epilogue*" when in reality it is in three closely-related acts, while the "*Prologue*" to Sardou's "*Madame Sans Gêne*" is divided from the rest of the play only by a lapse of fifteen years. Mere lapse of time obviously has nothing to do with it—a point that has been discussed some fifty pages back⁸—and consequently a whole "nest of plays" in that recent period when having prologues was dramatically fashionable, in reality had nothing but acts, no matter what was said to the contrary in their printed programs.

⁸ P. 185 f.

CHAPTER XXV

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE

THE essential antecedent fact, it will be noticed, is always translated into action of the present tense.

"Drama has gained conviction by striving to make you credit what you see instead of making you credit what you hear," says Clayton Hamilton.¹ The Montagues and Capulets have glared and fought for years; but it is made an immediate, compelling thing when Shakespeare opens "Romeo and Juliet" with a street brawl between representatives of the families. The resentment of Prospero toward his brother becomes exceedingly active when the brother is brought within range of the former's magic. Not all the bygone facts have to be translated into the present moment, only the salient purpose that holds them together.

Just how far to make the antecedent material active in the present moment, and how much of it to tell frankly, constitutes a delicate matter. The manner in which all of it is handled offers an excellent means of determining a dramatist's expertness in his craft.

EXPOSITION

As PASSIVE antecedent facts may be made to present compelling action in the play proper, so the striking scene con-

¹"If we review, with a single sweep of mind, the whole history of dramatic art," says Mr. Hamilton, amplifying this idea in his "Studies in Stagecraft," "we shall see that the drama began by being principally auditory, and that it has grown more and more visual from age to age, until today, for the first time, it makes its appeal mainly to the eye. Beneath this evolution we shall notice, as its motive, a constant and continual striving of the drama for more absolute, unquestionable credence. Æschylus was striving to make you credit what he told you: Pinero is striving to make you credit what you see." I cannot exactly agree with Mr. Hamilton that drama was principally auditory at the outset unless he is referring to the beginning of the modern drama in the church. All other early drama was conspicuously mimetic.

versely calls into being antecedent circumstances. I shall make a long jump to a couple of modern illustrations that come to mind. In "Madame X," the author, Alexandre Bisson, found that his plot required that Jacqueline should tell Laroque, her disreputable companion, that she brought her husband \$25,000 as a dower, that she is the wife of a Marquis and daughter of a General, and that she hungers to see her son while she fears to do so. Bisson had to invent a condition whereby logically she would so reveal her inmost secrets; probably this is why he placed Jacqueline at this time under the influence of ether used as an intoxicant. In "The Fourth Estate," by Joseph Medill Patterson and Harriet Ford, some intervention was required to prevent Wheeler Brand, the fearless young newspaper man who has attacked "the interests," from being discharged. Nolan, the new proprietor of the paper, is made to interfere on Brand's behalf when the lad's name is about to be taken from the pay-roll. Something had to be done, some cause provided, for Nolan's attitude. The authors motivated it by giving Nolan a long-standing enmity toward the dishonest judge involved. So a dramatist works backwards and forwards with his material.

Certainly the play should be interesting from the outset. The comparatively uninteresting circumstances, out of which action develops, must be handled in a manner that makes them more attractive than they really are. In Louis Calvert's "Problems of the Actor,"² the veteran artist relates a pertinent anecdote about Pinero at rehearsal of that scene in his play, "The Thunderbolt," in which many of the characters sit about a large table while two lawyers explain to them the law governing the making of a will:

Pinero stopped the rehearsal and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I know this is very prosaic and uninteresting to you, and that it will be so to the audience; but it is absolutely necessary, for the

² New York, 1918. This book is one of those rare commentaries that should be treasured while there is a literature of the theatrical profession. Mr. Calvert, apart from being one of the distinguished actors of the English-speaking stage in both hemispheres, was a remarkable stage director; and in this same volume he speaks in that capacity too. It was my privilege to check the splendid manuscript of this work for the publisher in advance of publication.

sake of what is to come, that this be driven into their minds. Now if you show by your attitude that you are not interested in it, you may be sure the audience will not be interested in it either. So when you reach the more interesting matter later on, which is founded on this dry law business, you will be surprised to find that you have lost your hold on the audience and that they do not realize what you are talking about. Therefore I beg of you to listen to this explanation of the law, and to show by your attitude and attention that the characters consider it of vital importance to them. Then the audience will listen to it, too."

Mr. Calvert then draws an important deduction for the actor; but it is equally if not more valuable to the dramatist: "Into this sage advice is packed a great truth, for the searching test of the actor lies in his ability to keep the audience alert and interested through what is often mere routine preliminary exposition." The dramatist should see to it that his exposition is sufficiently interesting that the actors will not have to pretend beyond their own natural obligation to do so.³

The general antecedent circumstances out of which the story of the historical continuity "Columbus" grows are that Europe, in 1485, was emerging from the Middle Ages with developed arts and crafts and reaching out for new trade routes, making the time ripe for discovery. In particular, there were reasons why King John II of Portugal was interested in finding a new route to India. Observe how these main facts and their qualifications are made active. At the beginning of the play we see King John in his private chamber examining Oriental silks and jewels displayed by a merchant-traveler, who tells him, at his request, of the strange lands from which they came. In the ante-chamber, waiting to see the King, is Christopher Columbus. Proving his outraged feeling he brusquely demands of the major-domo

³ Howard Lindsay, well-known stage director, once told me of a road company in which he acted, where the play was extremely poor; but by all the players pretending that every line was pregnant with meaning—talking in hushed tones, with significant looks and gestures—they persuaded their audiences that the drama was highly important, and so took in enough money to carry them home again.

that he be announced, only to be rebuffed by that personage, as he has been rebuffed in Portugal, so we are told, for the past four years. Meanwhile, in the King's chamber, John II registers his intense interest in trade with the East; but at this point, so the audience will not expect it to be all smooth sailing for Columbus when he reaches the King, the King's adviser, the Bishop of Ceuta, summons a negro slave bearing an elephant's tusk, symbolizing Portugal's trade with Guinea begun by the King's uncle, Prince Henry the Navigator, and says grimly, "African slaves and ivory have drained the treasury. Your Majesty would court disaster to open trade with Cathay." To which the King retorts, "If I do not, England, France and Spain will find new routes to India, leaving commerce over the old way to be destroyed by pirates." There is much more antecedent material brought into action that follows, the secret expedition sent out to test Columbus's plans without his knowledge, for example; but this description will suffice to show the general method of "putting it over" at the same time that interest is developed and sustained.⁴

Each new fact as it comes along, gives a new complexion to the course of events. Each bit is carefully considered for the place in the action where its introduction will do the most good to arouse or sustain interest. Hence, try not to introduce facts into a play until you really need them. That is the one way to extract all their value from them. When it appears that the King is in a favorable mood to consider the project of Columbus, the anxiety of the audience is quickened by showing the Bishop of Ceuta working against it by citing the heavy expenses of the ivory and slave trade. Yet the hope of Columbus is not entirely blighted, because the King sees danger of England, France and Spain opening the new routes before himself and profiting from monopolies. The succession of events apparently is telling the story; in reality, it is "planting" circumstances out of which true story is to grow.

⁴I refer here only to the continuity of "Columbus." Responsibility for the play made from it belongs to other hands.

MAKING READY

DRAMATIC effectiveness is dependent more upon what the audience knows beforehand than perhaps any other factor. When Price said that the playwright should ask himself constantly, "What will be the effect on the audience's present state of knowledge *if* this happens?" and, "What comes of this?" he undoubtedly was thinking of just this truth. The frame of mind with which the audience receives a fact altogether determines the significance of that fact. The same fact presented to several different states of mind would have the same number of different aspects. A person who has been attacked by a savage dog will look with certain fear upon another dog that, to a person convinced of the devotion of such animals, will be an object of immediate affection.

If one is presented with a scene showing a pretty girl fondling a cute little dog, the interest will be sustained in direct proportion to the prettiness of the girl and the cuteness of the dog. If the audience has been given advance knowledge that this dog belongs to the girl's lover, the scene has an added significance. If the audience has the additional information that the girl has quarreled with her lover, interest in the scene goes up another degree; and if it has been shown further that another lover is looking on, the scene becomes still more effective.⁵ How would it be possible to make people in general appreciate the grief of my wife when an automobile ran over and killed her pet cat? Only by making them share in her point of view, by giving them the earlier associations that made the cat dear to her. In other words, what is known as "preparation" has a vital importance in playmaking.

Preparation is devised not for the satisfaction of the characters, but for that of the audience. A character may look out of a window and register shock at what he sees. The inexperienced writer, desiring to impress the spectator with the character's state of mind, will withhold the cause of the shock—what is seen from the window—until after the character has

⁵ Another illustration of this same sort, showing increase in effectiveness, is given in "An Introduction to Dramatic Theory," by Allardyce Nicoll, London, 1923.

expressed himself. As a matter of fact, the interest of the spectator at the time of the shock will be less with the character than with the unknown spectacle, so he cannot give full attention to the character's reaction. The expert dramatist, on the other hand, will show the spectator the view from the window before the character himself sees it so that the spectator, knowing why the character is shocked, may give full attention to him.⁶

Lynde Denig affords me a convenient illustration in his continuity "The Pilgrims." An Indian comes to the cabin of Miles Standish seeking Squanto, the friendly redskin who lived with the whites. Standish considers how to reply, for a moment during which the audience is shown a flash of Squanto's grave, this being the first intimation in the play that Squanto is dead. Then the scene becomes Standish's cabin again. The reason for the doughty Captain's indecision now is clear to the audience. He makes up his mind. He goes to the window and points out the grave to his visitor. The audience knows what they are looking at, so gives undistracted attention to the reaction of the Indian visitor to the news. Had it been the dramatist's intention to take the attention altogether away from Standish and his visitor, and develop an incident at the grave it would have been logical and effective, of course, to have presented the grave first *after* Standish pointed it out.

In establishing the order of facts, always consider which fact is to show the reaction. This fact should come last. Reactions are in the present tense in drama, more than the impulses from which they grow. Impulses have their interest mainly in the future because we are anxious to see what will come of them. The collection of force is much more effective than its reflection.

The audience always should draw its own conclusions. The spectator's feeling that he is a free agent makes him far

⁶ Lucien Hubbard, well-known in the film world as a supervisor of production and himself an expert continuity writer, queries this point, stating that it often is effective to show the matter seen *after* the character looks. This is quite true. The point is to determine first which is to hold the interest, the character or the matter seen, this establishing the order of facts. The next paragraph makes this clear.

readier to enter the scene with the characters and give them copiously of his emotion, than when the dramatist tries to force his own notions upon him. This pleasure derived by the spectator in forming conclusions for himself is illustrated admirably in a strip of comic pictures drawn by Bud Counihan for the New York *Evening World* late in November or early in December, 1920. One Luke Little, according to the strip, accuses his wife of extravagance, and when she denies it, asks her to prepare a list of her expenditures. To which the wife replies, "You'll have to wait until I fill my fountain pen." Had Counihan had the wife merely return with a long list, the jest would have fallen flat; yet, when this same result is given by implication, that she will need plenty of ink with which to write the long list, the point wins a laugh. The reason is that this clever newspaper artist has given the spectator the full pleasure of discerning the humor unaided, of seeing the wife unwittingly betray the fault she has denied.

CHAPTER XXVI

PREPARATION

A SENSE of freedom from the artist's design is one of the most vital conditions of pleasure in the theater. The dramatist must conceal his art to make the spectators believe that their conclusions are their own. So soon as the audience suspects the symmetrical it becomes suspicious and hesitates to betray emotional reactions. The more the dramatist seems to prove the artlessness of what he does, the readier the spectator will give himself to the play. I believe that this explains much of the pleasure that is derived in the theater from the unexpected; the spectator's seeming omniscience (really founded on the dramatist's preparation) being jolted to a failure of anticipation as it would be in life, this seeming to prove to the spectator out of his own experience that the mimic life really *is* life. Nevertheless, the dramatist must make the spectator draw most specific deductions, or the dramatist will not be able to convey the central idea of his play. The way lies in preparation; through skillful preparation the playwright always may create in the spectator a frame of mind in which a given fact cannot fail to be accepted in one, predetermined way.

SKILLFUL "PLANTING"

THIS preparation must not be overdone, or the spectator will realize that he is being tricked. The audience must have just enough advance information with which to judge the new fact; and it must not be information given obviously to prepare for something yet to come. The man who insists that his friend shall ask him, "Why won't you starve on the

desert?" in order to utter the stale witticism, "Because of the sand-which-is-there," is destroying most of his effect by his clumsy preparation for it. On the reverse of the shield, the artist who, in London *Punch*, several years ago, created for you the picture of a motor-cyclist, whose eyes are fixed straight ahead as his machine dashes on at terrific speed, saying to his empty side-carriage, "Look out, Alf! We're coming to another bump!" prepared the way just as certainly; but he did it in a seemingly natural manner that completely hides all the art in it.

Too much preparation should not be given, but neither should there be too little. Only when the circumstances are planted completely is the spectator able to draw his conclusions. This is the guiding principle in the use of suggestion as opposed to bold statement; if the premises are incomplete the suggestion cannot be successful—the reason that so many "delicately written" plays are only obscure.

To overdo preparation is apt to smother the action. When a budding dramatist first acquires the habit of preparation he "prepares" all over the place. That same professor who declared that, "the climax of every good play must be in the mathematical middle," told a lady auditor at another lecture in his series, that if he had been George Broadhurst writing "Bought and Paid For," he would have "prepared for" the hero's habit of drinking heavily (a mere casual circumstance of the play) by establishing that the hero's father was a drunkard!

CAUSE AND EFFECT

THE cause, or preparation, should be kept just as close as practicable to its corresponding effect, mainly that the spectator may not be burdened by connecting facts over long stretches of other events. We hear nothing of Lamord, the fencing-master, in "Hamlet," until Act IV, Scene 6, shortly before it is necessary to account for the excellent swordsmanship of Laertes. This is a matter merely of keeping related facts together. At the same time there is danger of revealed artificiality in having preparation too close to its fact. It then has almost the same lack of conviction as an alibi after

the fact. There must be reasonableness about it. Polonius, in "Hamlet," promises the King to make Ophelia join Hamlet that he may watch them; but when he sends Ophelia out, Hamlet happens not to be there. Polonius does carry out his plan, but only with intervening chances, as in actual life. Thus it is that when one character prepares for the entrance of another character by saying, "Here he comes now," he is frequently mistaken. The one to enter is an unexpected person, and the one prepared for comes next.

"How," asked Ogier in the 17th century, "do the identifying rings, the shepherd-fosters, the good old nurses, always turn up exactly at the right moment? How is it that Creon and the old attendant of Laius, and the Corinthian who picked Œdipus up, all rendezvous at Athens in the nick of time?"¹ Skillful preparation much earlier in the play would have established the verisimilitude of this as it would have done in the last act of Porter Emerson Browne's drama "The Spendthrift," where all the major characters not already on the scene, whether related to one another or not, burst into the room for an ensemble finish, excusing their presence by saying that they "just happened to be passing in an automobile." If the point involved is slight, however, and natural enough to be within range of human probability, it is not necessary to prepare very far ahead. As W. T. Price used to say, "An unquestioned fact will stand."

There are occasions, moreover, when the course of dramatic events makes it impossible without forcing matters, to keep preparation close to its fact. In that case the dramatist ordinarily reminds the audience of his preparation just before presenting the fact. To illustrate this, let us assume a play in which one man saves the life of another as preparation for the benefactor to ask a great favor of his debtor, very much later in the action. Between the rescue and the request many other events transpire. The audience has virtually forgotten the rescue when it is time for the request. Some little incident is given to jog the spectator's memory, and thus he is restored to the frame of mind he had lost, in time to appre-

¹ George Saintsbury, "A History of Criticism."

ciate the request. The value of this device is strongly apparent when there is no time for elaborate preparation close the fact in the dramatic rush of emotion. To put it there would hold up the story and destroy the spectator's sensuous participation in the play. The way out of the difficulty is to put the elaborate preparation very far back in the story, and then recall it briefly when necessary, with some convenient symbol. A bit of hair in a locket may recall a romance; a blood-stained knife a tragedy; a pressed flower in a book may roll back the years.

DOUBLE DUTY

It is important that preparation should never be dependent on future events for its effectiveness; it should pay for itself in intrinsic value. That is, the audience should not have to wait until it is gone to derive pleasure from it. In Edward Knoblock's stage play, "Discovering America," the servant, Ernesto, kisses the ring of the Cardinal when the latter speaks to him. No spectator expects from that more than the authentic "business" it seems to be; but it really is preparation for the subsequent introduction of Miss Dix to the Cardinal. At that time the Cardinal holds out his hand to this young lady, and to his amazement and brief indignation, she shakes it instead of kissing the ring. Without the preparation the entire point of this would have been lost on many persons in the audience.

Whatever else preparation may do, it should not anticipate the action for which it prepares. Anticipated action means duplicated action, because, to all intents and purposes, the action is already done once in being anticipated.

Clumsy handling may reveal to the audience all that preparation is intended to do, this being an additional reason why preparation should interest for its own sake. In Act I of Belasco's fine play, "The Return of Peter Grimm," Dr. McPherson, the family physician, talks very entertainingly about spiritualism, the subject arising naturally from a discussion of the child, "little Willem," who is ill of an incurable disease

and must die ere long. To the audience it seems that the conversation has no other point than the disembodied life of little Willem; and theatergoers are much amused when the earnest Doctor, who believes implicitly in survival after death, arbitrarily forces a compact with the skeptical Peter that whichever dies first shall return and give the other evidence of his continued existence.

It seems just an abstract discussion between two contrary-minded men, developing their respective characters in the heat of it; and the audience for the time gives it no further thought. As a matter of fact this scene is preparation written with masterly care. The audience does not yet know that Dr. McPherson is convinced that Peter himself, who seems in robust health, is likely to die at any moment, and that he therefore wants Peter to come back and give him proof of survival. By withholding this information from the audience at this time (and this is natural because the physician does not want to shock Peter by telling him he is doomed), the audience does not anticipate Peter's return. The chances of Peter's death seem too remote when the compact is made. In fact, Peter continually jests about the Doctor going first. "You can't make me sick," he says, drinking his coffee. "I'm going to live to see babies in the house—and grow old with my house-dog, Toby." "Good God," cries the Doctor; "that dog is fifteen years old!" Peter turns to his ward, Kathrien, and says in his gentle way, "If Doc dies first, why, every time we hear a board squeak, or a door slam, or a shutter rattle, we'll say, 'Sh! There's Doc.'" Dr. McPherson is offended and starts home. Peter stops him and makes him shake hands. "Now don't be so touchy, Andrew! I'll make the compact. You're an old fool. But I'll come back, and if I find you're right, I'll apologize." And he goes for plum brandy to seal the bargain.

I cite this instance of preparation because it shows so clearly the manner in which a great dramatist avoids anticipation of his technical purpose and the way in which developed emotion in the present moment makes the preparation pay for itself.

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, HOW, AND WHEN?

THERE are certain broad questions that the public asks when a story begins, whether it is presented on the screen, on the stage, or in print. No one knows this better than the trained journalist; and he deliberately works to answer these questions in every piece of "copy" he clatters off on his typewriter.

I speak of the newspaperman particularly because I am thinking of something told me in 1914, when I was writing for the "copy-slot" myself. Ben H. Atwell, one of the best known and best liked theatrical press agents in America, told me the following: "When I was a 'cub' reporter, a great many years ago, the first fundamental pounded into me by a hard-headed city editor was that five cardinal principles govern news values—'who, what, where, how, and when'—with the emphasis strongly on the first. Thus, the assassination of a Greek hat-boy may be worth a 'stick' on an inside page, while the slightest accident to a Wilson or a Rockefeller, a Bryan or an Edison, automatically becomes 'first page must.' And the fire that cost four lives over in Harlem commands 350 words, while a fight among striking waiters at Broadway and Forty-second Street is likely to 'turn' page one."

I didn't ask for the authority of the city editor because I knew that he only echoed one of the standing mandates of his craft. Probably every newspaperman I ever have met has had it impressed upon him in the same way. Price had been a newspaperman; and he had discovered long before that the "who, what, when, where, and how" applied splendidly to plays. When a play begins, Price pointed out to me, the audience sees a striking character on the scene. "Who is this?" they ask. Then, in quick succession, "What is he doing?" "When is this?" "Where is this?" and, "How did it happen?" Price believed that the answers to these questions should be established very clearly within the first five minutes of the play. Otherwise the audience would become impatient. Certainly identities and relationships should be es-

tablished as soon as possible, because there can be no real story action until they are.

Price did not mean, of course, that this succession of questions was to be arbitrary in order. The questions should be settled in the order in which the spectators might ask them; and this depends, of course, on the play material. The play material might make it expedient to answer the "when" before the "who" or the "where" before the "what." The important point is to see that these questions, which are vital to understanding of the play, irrespective of their order, are answered. Let the dramatist ask them himself, while he writes the opening of each sequence, just to be sure he has made matters clear.

In answering them the dramatist has plenty of room for his ingenuity. Motion pictures answer the "who" along the line of least resistance by establishing identity of characters in subtitles; but on the stage there are no subtitles, and playwrights there have been compelled to exercise greater skill to introduce their persons. Stage writers have their conventions, of course. The practice of having a star character talked about by the lesser characters of the play, prior to his first entrance, until everything important that concerns him has been given to the audience, is grizzled with age. Only this device is too cumbrous for the introduction of the small rôles. The practice then is to establish identities in dialogue, providing sufficient motive for the discussion. Thus, a woman already on the scene might hear a newcomer enter the doorway. "Who is it?" she will ask. "Only your husband, my dear," may be the reply, and the relations are established at once.²

In "The Merry Wives of Windsor," Justice Shallow becomes known through his conversation with his companion Slender. They enter with Sir Hugh Evans, and the dialogue proceeds:

² Barrett Clark, in his "Study of the Modern Drama" (p. 225), ridicules the clumsiness in old misuses of this device by quoting the speech, ". . . I, Edmund Bulger, widower, have loved you, Mrs. Ruth Holt, widow, ever since you fust set foot in the Temple, fifteen years ago, a-bearing your two-year-old baby in your arms, ma'am."

SHALLOW. Sir Hugh, persuade me not; I will make a Star-Chamber matter of it: if he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, esquire.

SLENDER. In the county of Gloster, justice of peace, and *coram*.

SHALLOW. Ay, cousin Slender, and *Cust-alorum*.

SLENDER. Ay, and *ratolorum* too; and a gentleman born, master parson; who writes himself *armigero*; in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation, *armigero*.

SHALLOW. Ay, that I do.

Of course, there is more than mere naming in this; it gives characterizations of both Shallow and Slender in action.

An exceptionally interesting handling of the "who" occurs in C. Gardner Sullivan's photoplay, "Shell 43." The hero is a spy among the Germans during the World War, yet the fact that he is acting for the Allies is cleverly concealed till very late in the story. Just when the spectator has his mind made up that the hero is an Allied spy, the author shows him betraying the whereabouts of another Allied spy who is thereupon executed; and this, of course, makes the spectator, as well as the Germans who suspect him, discard that conclusion. Subsequently the hero's identity is demanded by a German. He produces evidence that he belongs to the highest branch of the German secret service. And so it goes until his real loyalty is proved at the end by his sacrifice of his own life for the Allied cause. I may add, as a further tribute to Sullivan's genius, that when "Shell 43" was written and produced, America had not yet entered the fight for the freedom of the world. Many persons in America had not yet committed themselves to indictment of Germany. By withholding the identity of his hero, Sullivan gave entertainment to all theatergoers without offending their sympathies.

Establishment of the "what" reverts to what has been said on the subject of devising an arresting incident for opening the play. The presentation of this incident should bring out the salient "news" it possesses—the extraordinary quality that makes its amplification worthy of attention and interest. So much already has been said on this point that I am sure it needs no further elucidation.

The "when," which is to say, "When is this?" deserves more attention, because much ingenuity has been exercised in meeting it. I already have told how William S. Hart's photoplay, "The Whistle," showed "in the morning" by a bottle of milk on the back porch with a puppy nosing into it. The sun rising to show morning and the sun setting to show evening have been done to death. So has the crowing Chanticleer; and it is with the utmost reluctance that an experienced picture man will resort to the hackneyed face of a clock. But the problem in opening an historical play is less to show the time of day than to establish the period. In "Columbus" the action begins with some skylarking courtiers and ladies-in-waiting in an atmospheric old garden at the court of King John II of Portugal. This scene establishes chiefly the flavor of the period; the actual time and place necessarily are fixed by a subtitle that follows it.

The "where" depends greatly upon the material. To register Venice by showing the Grand Canal or Paris by the Eiffel Tower is as obvious as it is to establish New York with the skyscraper horizon or the Statue of Liberty or the "white light district" at night. The dramatist merely tries to gather into one frame the characteristic features of the place of his action. There are typical features of the western ranch, the southern plantation, the northern timberland and the eastern city that need not be named because the audience already knows them all from personal contacts or from novel and short-story reading, if not from picture-going.³

The "how," or, "How did this happen?" really is the exposition of those facts that occurred before the beginning of the play; and on this score I already have said enough to indicate the usual procedure, which is merely to follow the compelling incident that opens the play with the circumstances out of which it rises.

MOOD AND PURPOSE

THERE is but one additional phase of this subject of how to begin the play, and that has to do with keynote. On this

³ For elaboration of this with further illustrations, see the chapters on scenery in my "Play Production in America."

point George Pierce Baker expressed himself in a lecture in 1913:⁴ "You should make the purpose of your play clear at the outset," he said. "Also, you should make clear what is to be the dramatic form of your play, whether tragedy, comedy, or farce."

The good sense of establishing purpose in the beginning is told by Aristotle in an anecdote about Plato.⁵ The latter once assembled his pupils to hear something about human goods and happiness and then proceeded to give them a lecture on mathematics. At its close he explained that he had been consistent because all goods are one; but this did not satisfy the pupils at all. They were disappointed in their expectations and condemned the master for deceitful practice. In Aristotle's opinion Plato was entitled to his view of the case, but he should have made it clear at the start. Aristotle said further that he, personally, always prepared his readers by informing them of the subject.

This does not mean foretelling the whole plot, as they used to do in the seventeenth century with their "dumb-shows" (one of which may be seen in advance of the "play within a play" in "Hamlet") and in the later, spoken prologues. It means, rather, to let the audience know where to fix its sympathy and what to hope for as the ultimate outcome. It is what Sanford Stanton calls, "getting off on the right foot."

The second part of Professor Baker's recommendation refers to what is known professionally in the theater as "tone" of a performance. The audience wants to have the mood set in the beginning. If the patrons are expected to laugh continuously, they want to know it; if to weep, they must know that, too. The dramatist is not obliged to conform with this desire merely because the spectators feel it; it makes his task easier. Folks need much less impulse to laugh once they have been stimulated to the laughing mood, as they weep more easily after having had the tear-ducts moistened.

⁴ Printed in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, July 2, 1913.

⁵ The anecdote is second-hand. Aristoxenus of Tarentum, a Greek peripatetic philosopher of the 4th century, B. C., says that he heard it from Aristotle, who was his teacher. His account is in his fragmentary "The Elements of Harmony," translated into English by H. S. Macran, Oxford, 1902.

Louis Calvert has a splendid chapter on the tone of a performance in his "Problems of the Actor." I quote from it this: "In any production there should be, as we have seen, a central theme to which all factors should be made to contribute. That is, the appeal of any play must be a localized one. A play must appeal to the sense of the whimsical primarily, or the sense of the tragic primarily, or the pathetic, or the comic, or the absurd—there must be one primary appeal to every play, there must not be more than one, we cannot mix the appeal—that is, the primary appeal—without disaster. There must, in other words, be an atmosphere or tone to which the whole of any given performance must be keyed. And this atmosphere counts more with an audience than skilled technique. It is the atmosphere, far more than the particular incidents of the story, that remains in our senses after we have left the theater. Most people have seen a play and liked it immensely, tried to tell the story to friends, and wondered, after a recital of the unadorned skeleton of the action, what there was in the play that was so pleasing. We have, in such cases, been charmed not by the story itself half so much as by the peculiar atmosphere or tone the actors were able to give the performance."

You may read the rest of Mr. Calvert's chapter with profit, for yourself.

It was to my mind a confusion of tones—a discord if you like, if that makes the metaphor better—more than anything else, that caused the much lamented failure of Philip Barry's fantastic play, "White Wings." Sometimes it was comedy, sometimes farce, and sometimes tragedy—none of which need be wholly excluded, but all save one of which should have been subordinated to a controlling spirit.

Story writers have discovered that there are certain themes the treatment of which actually gains in being removed from the spectator's life. Thus, Dickens pretends in "The Pickwick Papers" that the MS. of a madman was "found among the papers of a medical man;" "Frankenstein" similarly reaches the reader by an obscure route and Stevenson contrives the story of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" as a collection of manuscripts from which the reader is left to draw his own

conclusions. Period background is used, too, to intensify the wonder feeling—the sense of “once-upon-a-time.”

And Max Reinhardt, in “Sumurûn,” deliberately intensified the unreality of an Arabian Night’s fantasy and gave it the nature of a dream, by making the characters, in all their strange, impossible being, walk into the stage action out of the audience!

SCENARIO

IT SEEMS generally true that better plays result from prepared, written outlines than from mental notes; but all depends on the dramatist. If he feels certain enough of his structure without putting down guide-lines, all well and good. He will not be judged by that—only by what he produces. It seems to me, however—and I dare say also to most working playwrights—that the structure of a play is too complicated for any writer to carry it all successfully in his head. The present pages have presumed up to this point, that the dramatist has made repeated sketches of his intended action, to be thrown aside as each succeeding one carried matters further; but here we may think of the master-outline that concludes the series and is to guide the final work of dialogue and business. This is called the scenario.

Playwrights differ very widely in their opinions of what a scenario should be. Some would so term the pages of notes reproduced in this book from the work of Owen Davis and George S. Kaufman; others insist on long, detailed accounts running into fifty or sixty typewritten sheets. But their magic depends, as I say, on the man who needs them for guidance. In the motion picture studios, where the scenario is the play itself, from which the director visualizes the whole action directly “on set,” several stages of development are recognized. There is first the short synopsis, a mere sketch of the plot movement, which probably occupies no more than a single page. Next comes the long synopsis, ten or fifteen pages, an amplification of the first form that goes into character motives and incidents. Then there is the “adaptation,” a synopsis converting the action into material suitable for picture purposes. Following that we have the “treatment,”

a long, detailed synopsis that is practically a novelization of the material, a description that tells with great particularity just how the picture will appear to the audience, on the screen; and finally there is the "continuity," in which the treatment is broken up into scenes with technical directions for the use of all production departments.

Some of the foregoing varieties are prepared, of course, not for the use of the screen dramatist himself, but for other persons to check his work as he goes along. The stage dramatist does not halt at so many intermediate places unless he is trying to sell his work in advance of completion. Selling a play in this fashion is in the main for established dramatists. There are a few exceptions, such as the play contracted for a few years ago by A. H. Woods when the previously unknown author telegraphed him his sensational idea for a melodrama in which the testimony convicting a criminal was put forward principally by a blind man and a deaf man whose limited versions were to be acted out on the stage; but, by and large, producers will not even consider a scenario because so much depends on the way in which its promises will be fulfilled. Indeed, even an established dramatist who sells a play in this manner, usually finds that the manager's anticipation of results has been so radically different from his own that they never can satisfactorily get together.

The stage dramatist's scenario, however he cares to set it down, is his design; and as Galsworthy says in his "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama:" "The dramatist's license, in fact, ends with his design. In conception alone he is free." But whether the design exists in his head or on paper does not especially matter. Whether or not, in the scenario he uses, the scenes are numbered, the characters are described, or snatches of dialogue are given is entirely for his own taste. I personally used to make rather full scenariii, and I find myself now more conveniently served with a batch of cards that I can shuffle about as occasion demands; but there is no magic in that whatever. It's just what I find useful in my particular circumstances; you may find something very different that better suits yours. For some interesting profes-

all
beginner
40000

Act II Road to Rome

Three or four soldiers
talking. Discuss campaign -
elephants - MAGO - Rome -
Plant sleeping quarters.

HASORVAL in. Bowls them
out. Soldiers go. MAGERBAL
and CARTHAGO in. Talk about
HAN his twin. MAGO in.
HAWAIBAL in. Talks with
them (not much of this.)
Egyptian clerk writing.

MAGERBAL, HAS. and
CART. go. HAN and MAGO
talk as brothers. HAN goes out
SERGEANT in. Announces
spy caught. "Send her in."
ANYTIS, slaves + soldiers in.
She bids MAGO. HE sentences
her to death. HAN in. She
appeals to him. HAN sends
others out. They sit down to
start talking. (MAGO sounds
wary on exit.)

HAN orders supper for
himself + MAGO.

Idle talk. HAWAIBAL is
wildly amused by her.
Slave brings in supper
ANYTIS thanks HAN. for this
act of courtesy. She starts asking questions.

MEMORANDUM

rapid fire
to the
p. 100 the common form

Courtesy of the Author

SCENARIO OF ROBERT SHERWOOD'S "ROAD TO ROME",
ACT II

A dramatist in the workshop is properly more interested in recording his ideas than he is in whether to use pen, pencil, typewriter or to dictate or any other such detail. The record here is on a memorandum-pad such as is used in the office of "Life" of which Mr. Sherwood happens to be editor. The telephone number in the upper left-hand corner is that of "The New York World;" the marginal sketches probably represent periods of interruption or of indecision.

sional examples, however, see those given by George Pierce Baker in his "Dramatic Technique."

Methods differ. Take that of Channing Pollock, for instance, which is as honest as a method can be. In a recent letter he wrote me this about it: "With me a play is begun when I have decided upon a theme I wish to demonstrate dramatically. Immediately, I start an envelope for memoranda to be used in this demonstration. Anywhere from a year to twenty years later, I go over this memoranda—which, by this time, may consist of hundreds of notes—and, from it, devise a plot. This plot is divided into acts, and then subdivided into scenes. For each scene there is an envelope containing all the notes that may bear upon it.

"I begin the actual writing of each scene by making a sketch of the 'movement,' or trend of that scene. Then I develop each section of the scene by writing down everything that I can think of that I want to say in the direction indicated. The third draft expands these suggestions into dialogue more or less cumulative and dramatic. When I have cut this dialogue to the bone, I am ready to begin with my fourth draft, which means putting that section of the scene in question into something approaching final form.

"Of course, I did not do all this work when I was writing melodramas of the type of 'The Sign on the Door,' but I have found it necessary in plays intended to bring out certain arguments, pro and con, and to bring them out as economically and dramatically as possible."



PART NINE

CHARACTERIZATION

CHAPTER XXVII

PUPPETS

THE ultimate effect of a play is produced mainly by its characters. But discussion of a play from the standpoint of its ultimate effect cannot be very helpful to the working dramatist because he scarcely may place himself in the position of judging fully-rounded character while he is still in process of creating it. The analytical critic may have disposed of the subject of characterization long ago, but the dramatist, feeling his way along the line of his particular problem, is only just becoming sensible of the need. Practical assistance must show him how to continue building out of clues he has actually in hand.¹

This may be done by considering his especial problem alone or by demonstrating to him active dramatic principles useful in meeting problems in all plays that he may write in future. The latter synthetic way is to be preferred over the analytical method, largely because it convinces him of the good sense of what he is required to do. And to conform with the synthetic way in this place, we must begin at the beginning and inquire why a play should have characters at all.

¹ "The Art of Inventing Characters," by Georges Polti, translated by Lucile Ray (Franklin, Ohio, 1922), analyzes the kinds of persons there are in the world, and groups them under a few headings that are suggestive but necessarily arbitrary. The book is interesting as a psychological study, but I fear not as helpful as it would be if it also considered characters in their relationship to literary and dramatic plots.

IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER

STRICTLY speaking, no one on earth knows precisely why a play should have characters, for the answer is part of the eternal mystery of life itself. We know only that without the element of character an audience derives no lasting satisfaction from dramatic representation. It may be merely a way of linking us closer with the pleasure and usefulness of vicarious experience. In the last earthly analysis it may be said only that character seems indispensable to human enjoyment of a certain species of entertainment. That it is vital because it brings action as close as possible to the spectator's personal experience is only a guess. Character is a phenomenon that exists—like rain, gravitation, relativity, green cheese, and new-mown hay. We may prove it, test it, and adapt it to useful ends; but its why remains a great enigma, probably forever beyond mundane power to solve.

Nevertheless, the scientific spirit never completely resigns itself to mystery. The great Johannes Müller remarked in his "Elements of Physiology" that, "Though there appears to be something in the phenomena of human beings which cannot be explained by ordinary mechanical, physical, or chemical laws, much may be so explained, and we may without fear push these explanations as far as we can, so long as we keep to the solid ground of observation and experiment." For the purpose in hand, and in view of what has been said in the very early chapters of this book about the philosophy of the art, it seems reasonable to conclude that the because of drama requiring personal agents is that drama is essentially an imitation of human life, and human life would be impossible to imitate without characters.

It is true that this explanation also is limited by our ignorance of God's purpose in life, but it is fairly useful as a working basis. It was satisfying to Adolphus W. Ward in beginning his admirable monograph on "Drama" for the eleventh "Encyclopædia Britannica:" "The first step towards the drama," he said there, "is the assumption of character, whether real or fictitious. It is caused by the desire, inseparable from human nature, to give expression to feelings

and ideas. These man expresses not only by sound and gesture, like other animals, and by speech significant by its delivery as well as by its purport, but also by imitation super-added to these."

The fact that drama in its best form concerns human beings rather than broad events has been accepted for centuries. Aristotle says specifically that "an imitation" implies personal agents, and in his "Poetics" refers indirectly to the phenomenon a number of times.² Indeed, I do not know of a single authoritative objection to the statement that we must have personal agents for theatrical representation. There are the characters Bread and Cold-in-the-Head in Maeterlinck's "The Blue Bird;" but they really are persons. There are plays wherein the chief figures of the action are animals. I recall an act in vaudeville where the entire entertainment was conducted by dogs without a human being visible; and we have had numerous motion pictures using creatures of the barnyard to tell their stories. In every case, however, the characters do not present themselves as animals, but as animals masquerading as human beings.

The obvious explanation is that animals in their own identities cannot provide the varied, emotional entertainment for which theaters are primarily built. The drama exclusively of animals for their own sake, save through an occasional stretch of genius such as that of Jack London or of James Oliver Curwood, is extremely limited. Interest in performing animals seems to lie mainly in their efforts to demonstrate their kinship with human beings. They will count, or spell, or smoke a pipe, or stand erect, none of which is normally expected of them. They are humans by proxy,

²I keep harking back to Aristotle not merely because of his authority but because he is the first important dramatic theorist known to us, his utterances proving that valuable observations of dramatic truth have been recorded for the world during many hundreds of years. In the concluding paper of "The Hamburg Dramaturgy," Lessing pays a splendid tribute to "The Poetics" of Aristotle: "I do not however hesitate to acknowledge (even if I should therefore be laughed to scorn in these enlightened times) that I consider the work as infallible as the 'Elements' of Euclid. Its foundations are as clear and definite, only certainly not as comprehensible and therefore more exposed to misconstruction. Especially in respect to tragedy which time would pretty well permit everything to us, I would venture to prove incontrovertibly, that it cannot depart a step from the plumb-line of Aristotle, without departing so far from its own perfection."

consenting to which you will have granted all that is necessary to bring their example within the scope of the theory that, while plays without human beings or *their equivalent* are not impossible, they are impractical.

There is a seeming exception in the marionette show; but the word "equivalent" embraces marionettes, for they, also, in their peculiarly delightful dramatic entertainment, are but representatives of men. In the same way, what are only shadows on the screen are for all practical purposes the actors themselves, and through them, the characters.

POWER IN NUMBERS

I HAVE spoken of *characters* in a play instead of just *character*. Why should there be more than one? Well, again it is a matter of practicability. It is possible to have a dramatic action with but a single character, although it is only recently that I was willing to concede the fact.

My conversion came after seeing Lloyd Hamilton in his film farce "April Showers." In one sequence of this comic patchwork the ingenious comedian sustained dramatic interest for perhaps ten minutes with no other assistance than came from an umbrella, some April showers, and a set of false whiskers. What he achieved here deserves record. "Ham," as he prefers to be called, was about to step outdoors this bright, spring day, when suddenly it began to rain. He returned for his umbrella, but no sooner had reappeared than the sun emerged. Back went Ham. When he set foot outdoors once more without the umbrella it was raining. The vexed man determined to fool the weather. He pretended to reënter the house, whereupon the rain stopped, only to start as soon as he tried to leave. This diverting nonsense was varied until all of its mirth-provoking possibilities had been exhausted, at which time Ham terminated the episode with fresh business, hoodwinking the weather by coming from the house in disguise. There is only one character in this contribution to theatrical pleasure, yet I would unhesitatingly call it excellent in kind.

While the incident proves that more than one character is

not vital to a play, it points also to the really constructive fact. It may be set down as a valid principle that a single character cannot enact a dramatic situation *unaided*. There need not necessarily be other characters; but there must be factors answering the same purpose, for a character cannot manifest itself fully without some external impulse. Lloyd Hamilton derived indispensable assistance in the aforementioned interlude, from the sun, and the rain; the stage playlet of some years ago that was conducted throughout by a man alone at a telephone, had additional characters none the less real because they had to be imagined at the other end of the line; the young lady "heroine" in "The Marvels of Science," a one-act play published in April, 1901, by *Scribner's Magazine*, had a human coadjutor despite the fact that all given the audience to prove it was the voice of her lover on a phonograph; even the familiar, vaudeville monologist is obliged to use other characters beside himself, albeit they are not present with him on the platform.

It is true that a mother may manifest her motherliness by weeping over a photograph of her son; a deferred lover may make his doubt intelligible by successively picking the petals from a daisy; a thief may convey the emotion of a tense moment in his life with only a diamond ring on the scene beside himself—but none of these simple provocations to character manifestation is sufficient to prolong dramatic interest to a satisfying degree. If the given subject is to have more than incident value, we want to know more about the mother, and about the lover, and about the thief; and there necessarily are important phases of each character that cannot be brought out well save through the contact of other characters. Therefore I have said that a play without more than one character is impractical.

The central character grows and changes with the story in response to consistent impulses; and what is more feasible than to embody these impulses in a secondary character that grows and changes, too? To have the impulses come from a secondary character is not only more practical but simpler. If the value of keeping the "menace" simple is not apparent, then many preceding pages of this book have been written in

vain. Moreover, to revert to the inexplicable phenomena of the human mind, audiences prefer flesh-and-blood factors to passive symbols, however well these may serve the purpose of inducing character manifestation.

When the source of the impulses that produce the reactions of the central character is a human being with individual power and volition, we have the dramatic value of character clashing upon character. The plot unfolds through their opposition. It is easy to see from this why the characters *are* the story. It is of them and by them and belongs to them jointly. In the nature of the case a complete dramatic representation is a group product. The play is not the exclusive business of any one figure, but is constituted by the sum of all contributions.

One character is necessary, and at least two are advisable. More than two may be described best as convenient—but bear in mind that convenience is a highly reasonable excuse in the theater. If one hundred—nay, one thousand—characters are really required to create the central impression of a worthy play, their existence is fully justifiable.

This statement sounds suspiciously like the dogma of the purely analytical critic. Let us consider how to make the point self-evident. How is a dramatist to know when he has a sufficient number of characters?

This, it soon appears, is a matter largely for his own judgment. The story needs just as many characters as it requires mediums of expression, for the characters express the play. Some will express the plot primarily, others will contribute atmosphere, and certain figures will “put over” details of technical strength. Characters expressing plot should be as few as possible, because too many divisions of interest bewilder the audience, weakening its attentiveness. Simplicity means strength. Each figure, whether important or trivial, should care for just as much of the play as is consistent with individual performance. It should stop there because a character cannot shift abruptly from one peculiar line of expression to another without being unconvincing. Wherefore it may be said that the number of characters

should be virtually identical with the number of diverse lines of expression existing at one time.

To summarize, characters must be consistent in what they do, because drama, being an imitation of life, requires personal agents who must resemble living persons so far as is compatible with the story that is presented;³ and because pre-conception of the story must be concealed that the illusion of life may be complete, its movement must appear to grow from the volitions of the characters themselves. They must convey the impression of being free agents in what they say and do, which is to say, as free as persons in similar circumstances in real life would seem to be.

But how is the dramatist to find the characters who are to be assigned to the diverse lines of expressions? Why was it necessary to add Fortinbras to the *dramatis personæ* of "Hamlet"? What strange impulse induced Shakespeare to create that pathetic monster, Caliban? Upon what ground is any character created?

FUNCTION OF CHARACTER

THE question is, purpose; and the answer is—purpose. Characters are brought into existence in answer to specific needs. Hamlet required the example of a noble man doing great deeds for abstract principle in order to be impressed with his own obligation to act with far better motive, to avenge his father, to be faithful to his trust; hence Shakespeare provided Fortinbras. The story of "The Tempest" probably at first required merely a native of the lately discovered and still mysterious Bermudas (although I believe that the English discoverers found no living things on the island but some roving pigs), and so brought into being Caliban. In any case, whether my explanation of Caliban will or will not stand the test of scholarship, it may be de-

³ Or, rather, who must resemble what audiences *believe to be* persons compatible with such a story. The spectators have their own peculiar ideas of what heroes and villains and the rest ought to be like in manner and appearance. George M. Cohan wrote an article on this subject called, "Stage Traditions," for the *Sunday Magazine of The New York Tribune*, Feb. 18, 1912.

pended upon that he was evoked not out of sheer exuberance of the poet's fancy, but in response to a real need.⁴ In the year 1838 the London critic John Forster, in welcoming back the Fool in Macready's restoration of the original text of "King Lear"—long absent from the stage because of unhappy adaptations—pointed out numerous places wherein the jester really was vital to the action.⁵

The need may be great or small, but it certainly may be found. Characters may be introduced merely for atmosphere, as those which appear in the opening scenes of Ros-tand's "Cyrano de Bergerac," or frankly for comic relief, as the quibbling attendants so common in popular successes of all ages, or to symbolize a peculiar sentiment, as the Rat-Wife in Ibsen's "Little Eyolf;" but all should exist with design or be eliminated.

Reasons for characters frequently are temporary. When David Belasco and Charles Frohman revived D'Ennery and Corman's "A Celebrated Case," a few years ago, some question was raised as to the relevance of O'Rourke, the Irish soldier of fortune. Why should the authors have put into a play designed for the French stage, a man whose brogue could not be used with effect? In C. F. Burnand's version of the play, called "Proof," this character did not occur at all.

Then it was found that he was the invention of A. Cazau-ran, the house dramatist of the old Union Square Theater, New York. At the time the play had been produced there—along in the '70's—American interest in Ireland had been awakened through Fenian raids in Canada and temptestuous emerald politics; and this character, a Frenchman in the

⁴ The literature concerning Shakespeare's motives and implications in "The Tempest" is very considerable. An essay of particular interest is Rudyard Kipling's "How Shakespeare Came to Write the 'Tempest,'" published originally in the *London Spectator*, July 2, 1898, and subsequently by the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, New York, 1916. On the character Caliban I have found much to stimulate the imagination in correspondence that appeared in *London Notes and Queries*, 1868-9, the most ingenious suggestion being that Shakespeare conceived him out of an imperfect, contemporaneous description of a tortoise. In fact, Prospero, during the first act, refers to him as a tortoise. Dryden discusses Caliban in the preface to "Troilus and Cressida."

⁵ "Dramatic Essays of John Forster and George Henry Lewes," with Notes and an Introduction by William Archer and Robert W. Lowe, London, 1896.

original, "Un Cause Célèbre," had been made Irish to capitalize it.

Many another character has found its way upon the stage in response to some ephemeral topic, although more frequently the topic is tied up with an already existing character, as indeed, O'Rourke was a mere graft upon an existing Frenchman. Certainly there was no plot reason why George Ade should have required Thomas Meighan, as hero in the engaging photoplay, "Back Home and Broke," to give a radio concert to his neighbors (unless to prove his hospitality with a brand-new device that his progressive father would have approved, to neighbors who were soon to flout him); but it was a wholesome recognition of a great invention lately come to public notice, that amply paid for itself in laughter. A "lemonade supper" probably would have served the plot as well, but it would not have had these extra little virtues.

Hosts of celebrated stage figures have been invested with minor peculiarities for reasons that to-day have lost their significance. There is ground to believe, for example, that Hamlet is "fat and scant of breath" because that description fit Richard Burbage, who first acted the part.⁶ The characters of Shakespeare, Molière, and Sheridan were virtually all designed to fit requirements of stock companies, the members of which had to be kept employed, and whose little traits were frequently "written in." There are many more illustrations of this practice of character embellishment in the history of the harlequinade. Even the costumes of the splendid old pantomimic figures have interesting significances that are lost to modern audiences. The conventional lozenges of color in the dress of Harlequin himself are said to be the vestiges of colored rags and patches worn by the tramp in the comedies of ancient Greece.

Thus far I have spoken only casually of the needs that bring play characters into being. In practice the playwright is not so off-hand. For him his drama is a succession of

⁶ It is only fair to note that some Shakespearean editors insist that "fat" is only a misprint in the First Folio, and that the word should be "faint." In support of the main point, however, the reader is referred to the collection of examples in the chapter entitled, "The Influence of the Actor" in "A Study of the Drama," by Brander Matthews.

technical requirements to be met by characters of very specific sorts. First of all, his plot has necessitated the employment of certain persons. Let us say that his action concerns a husband who kills a rival for alienation of his wife's affections. At once there spring into being three characters, the husband, the wife, and the rival—although the husband and the rival may be all that are actually needed to carry on the play. In response to similar, direct needs, the supplementary characters present themselves.

Each character is properly invented for an especial purpose which not only justifies its existence but establishes the kind of character it is to be. We mention a husband who performs his greatest service to the plot in killing his rival; hence it is reasonable to infer that in the husband's character jealousy plays for the time a major part. The rival's plot action certainly indicates a dishonorable fellow, while the wife's susceptibility brands her as unstable—weak, if not fickle. These deductions may be modified in the dramatist's detailed work that follows; but characterizations nevertheless should provide complete motivation for each particular plot service. One might almost set forth an axiom that a character's dominant emotion should correspond with its dominant act. Otherwise the force of the entire play will be weakened because the character cannot then carry conviction. But without trying to utter axioms, let it be said in sum that plot action creates its own essential characters and assigns to each its peculiar bent.

EXTERNALIZATION

GRANTING that characters are the chief mediums through which the story of the play is expressed, and recalling that dramatic expression is governed by certain active principles, it follows that the characters, too, must be governed by the principles. If *A* is *B*, and *B* is *C*, therefore *A* also must be *C*. That is all very logical.

The principles were summarized at the close of the eighth chapter substantially in these words: A play should be represented visually, should command attention, arouse in-

terest, and evoke sympathy; it should be a complete subject with all parts belonging; it should concentrate its action on one character primarily, this character being involved in opposing circumstances, exercising his will to be rid of them; the play should have an object represented by the outcome of the struggle, and it should be constructive in its end. In one way or another character is amenable to all these points. I say in one way or another because principles governing a whole play must be different to some degree from those governing a character which is only a part of it.

Probably the most vital mechanical application is in that principle which obliges character to make itself intelligible through the terms of the medium. First and foremost in the theater the spectator must *see*. Inner processes of thought, when these are important to the entertainment, must be translated into visual symbols, else be weakened to the audience. I mean that they will be weakened in any forceful sense, for it is an easy matter—as many casual persons have discovered—to present them in mere talk.



CHAPTER XXVIII

PORTRAITS FROM LIFE

IF THE close connection of play characters with the plot in which they figure was all there is to characterization, they would be puppets indeed. And being puppets in that sense would not necessarily be contemptible, either, for we, ourselves, bear substantially the same relationship to our past experiences as these mimic figures do to the springs of their plot. It is a mere linking of cause and effect that has been frequently remarked. A convenient comment from critical history is a statement from Thomas De Quincey's biographical essay on Charles Lamb, "The character in a capital degree molds oftentimes the life, but the life *always* molds the character."

The contemptible thing about a puppet or a marionette is the realization that it is worked by the showman's fingers. Only when we can be made to believe that it is an entity animated from within, do we accept it as a vehicle of truth. The contemptible thing about a character in a play, on the other hand, is the realization that its actions were preconceived by the dramatist. The degree to which such preconception is perceptible to the audience is the measure which distinguishes melodrama and farce—wherein plot action clearly dominates the characters—from drama and comedy, higher forms in which characters seem to shape and control the plot. To carry on the analogy with the puppet or the marionette, one may suppose that as long as the preconception of play character is kept hidden from the audience by the ingenuity of the dramatist, the character will be accepted as living.

In the main this is so; but there is little value in having a

character live if its actions are stupid and uninteresting. We are surrounded every day in life with persons who unquestionably live and breathe, but whose flat affairs are of no consequence whatever. They are commonplace and dull, although among them may be men and women whose pasts are colorful and vivid. The fact is that interest in a character, a human being or one belonging to the theater, based wholly upon circumstances that have gone before, will not long endure.¹ We are interested primarily in the character's present. Moreover, referring specifically to motivation, we are interested more in what a character does than in what moves him to do it.

Now then, if the major interest lies in the character's present, and the complete reasons for its action, as supplied by the dramatist, lie in the past, what is the magic quality that enables an effective character to rivet the attention of the audience?

THE CHARACTER'S FREE WILL

TO REPEAT, we are more interested in what a character does than in what moves him to do it. It is the choice he makes of the alternatives that are presented to him by the situation, the element of decision which he brings to bear upon the situation of his own free will, that evokes the maximum interest in him. Hamlet is one of the greatest characters in all literature mainly because we see him constantly in process of making up his mind out of the rich philosophy of life which the play contains.

The character who weighs his motives is necessarily a more considerable (and hence more interesting) person than one who does not. It is his volition, his choice of alternatives, his decision, that makes all the motivation of secondary importance. To illustrate, let us say that A steals property from B, thereby giving B a reason, or motive, for seeking revenge. If the situation happens to be that in Victor Hugo's "*Les Misérables*," wherein Jean Valjean robs his benefactor,

¹ Still, it has often been observed that Napoleon cannot appear in any play as a mere minor character, walking through, without drawing disproportionate attention to himself.

Monseigneur Welcome, the Bishop, then B acts in a way decidedly peculiar to himself. He releases the misguided A from the custody of the three gendarmes who have arrested him, and makes him a gift of the stolen silver together with 200 francs to be expended as becomes an honest man. If the motive was all there was to this particular character, there could be nothing constructive or unexpected in the situation that ensues. As it stands, however, the motive is a mere incitement to action that requires the decision (or volition) of the character before action may develop in the general direction of the character's purpose. In a very small way this illustration indicates the differences between motive, volition, and purpose, terms far too loosely applied in most critical analyses of character.

"The noblest study of man is Man," I believe the old adage reads; and the more it concerns man's effort to control his own psychological processes for his own betterment, the more intensively interesting it becomes—and the more difficult to write about. The stage development of the proposition clause, "Jane concludes that her faithless husband is worth loving," is harder to make plausible than, "Jane concludes that her faithless husband is *not* worth loving," because it involves extra and unusual elements of decision. The delineation of finer feeling invariably calls on the dramatist for finer work.

Thinking this matter of a character's free will through to scientific conclusion is likely to uncover the astounding fact that the exertion of free will is neither more nor less than the assertion of soul, which, being true, would raise playwriting (as a revelation of free will) to a preëminence among the arts. In all events, we know that the element of human decision—that added consciousness with which we think—is something apart from the promptings of past experience and the existing contacts with the outer world. There is no better proof of its separate existence than that old test wherein we take a pencil in our fingers, holding it vertically by the upper end, resting the other end firmly on a table, and without changing our physical position in any degree, find ourselves able to sense at will either the contact

of our fingers with the pencil or of the pencil with the table. So do we throw the weight of our volition into matters requiring choice.

The foregoing is merely a detailed restatement of the fact established in very early pages that the exercise of will is a fundamental characteristic of drama.² The important point here is that real character has volition; and if mimic character is obliged to give the complete illusion of life, it must have volition, too. As Private Mulvaney so repeatedly maintains in Kipling's "Soldiers Three," people act all "accordin' to our natures and disposishins." Play characters should act, therefore, not for dramatic convenience, but for the way they personally think and feel. As intimated before, in a well-constructed drama this is so far true that it is difficult for the critic to say whether the characters make the plot or the plot makes the characters.

There is little character in the girl who is led into evil by the villain and out of it by the hero; until she exercises her own intelligence, she is a mere puppet. But writers of melodrama took a long step out of the arbitrariness of situation into the introspection of character when they coined that famous heroine's line, "Curses on my fatal beauty!"

One frequently hears of fascinating characters that lure a dramatist far out of his intended path while he is writing about them. The late George Bronson-Howard, who did some exceedingly clever playwriting for Broadway, once summarized his own method in these words: "Get your characters and they'll make your play for you. I never know just how my play is going to end when I begin to write. I know in a general way what the main situation will be like, but that is all. In a measure they are independent of me and my whims."³ Every earnest dramatist becomes aware of that independence. Even Ibsen said that he had to make three casts of a play before he felt on speaking terms with his characters.

The popular example of what a willful character may do

² See especially p. 73 f.

³ The *New York Press*, January 25, 1914. One of a series of interviews with prominent dramatists by Harold E. Stearns.

is the case of the little prince in Rostand's "L'Aiglon," who became a star part for Mme. Bernhardt, when in the original design the central character had been the old soldier Flambeau, meant for representation by the distinguished Coquelin. Even to hint at censuring Rostand, the man of genius, is an impertinence; and yet there is no doubt that the shift of emphasis everywhere in his play by the gradual obtrusion of the prince, must have troubled the poet far beyond the necessities of the matter had he determined in advance that Flambeau was *not* to be the star.

In the point under discussion the dramatist's problem is to devise his characters so that none of them naturally wants to do anything in the course of the action that the plot would not legitimately compel it to do. Or, if he prefers to create his characters first, he must work out a plot every turn of which is their logical, reasonable expression. "A bad plot," says Galsworthy in "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama," "is simply a row of stakes with a character impaled on each—characters who would have liked to live, but came to untimely grief; who started bravely, but fell upon these stakes, placed beforehand in a row, and were transfixed one by one, while their ghosts stride on, squeaking and gibbering throughout the play."

So it is that the characters have minds of their own that the dramatist must consult before he arbitrarily makes them act. And thus we have the seeming paradox that effective characters must do *everything* of their own volition, and yet cannot be permitted to do *anything* merely because they want to do it. "Purpose and will," as Macready noted in his "Reminiscences," "are the general foundations of character."

INDIVIDUALITY

IT HAS been made clear in earlier pages that characters are in themselves the play. It is their interrelation that works out the story presented. The reason story results from their clash, one upon another, is that each principal is a character different in some respect from the others. If all the characters were of one mold there obviously could be no play

problem. Wherefore individuality becomes an added necessity of dramatic portraiture. To mention another reason, the volition of character is essentially an expression of self, and self certainly is individuality.

Every effective character in a play is individual either in appearance or in manner. Edward Peple, author of "The Prince Chap" and "A Pair of Sixes," declared that the face of a man with a crossed eye or a broken nose will linger longer in the memory of his friends than that of a man with regular features.⁴ It is in conformity with this singular truth that most dramatists give characters eccentric make-ups and costumes. The old man with the squint in "The Fortune Hunter;" the paralytic in "Alias Jimmy Valentine;" the "pale-faced kid" with the hectic flush, in "The Greyhound," all are convenient instances. Any of George M. Cohan's plays will provide a whole gallery of others. So will any play by William Collier. Each figure there is individual in appearance and, in a sketchy way, in character.

A somewhat cleverer instance is the boy with the changing voice in Augustus Thomas's play "The Model." The tubercular cough of Dr. Rank, in "A Doll's House," is still more reasonably employed as a badge of identification. The stuttering character, the lisping character and similar figures are well known.

In better plays the tendency is to use these external badges as mere supplementary points of difference, making the character memorable for a habit of mind more than for anything else. Thus, Miss Pettingill, in Edward Locke's "The Case of Becky," is remembered by her inability to see a joke. Aslaksen, the printer, who appears in Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" and also in the earlier "League of Youth," is recalled mainly for his timidity in the face of great adventure. In Galsworthy's first play, "Joy," Miss Beech soon makes herself distinctive by her worriment over the earthworms that have been collected for fisherman's bait, and maintains her humane character throughout, while in every other play that Galsworthy has permitted the world

⁴ Article on Characterization by Edward Peple in *The New York Sunday Times*, May 17, 1914.

to see, each portrait drawn shows qualities all its own. There is no master of characterization in the field of modern drama who can rank with John Galsworthy, and there are no better models of characterization to study than those in his published works.

The objective quality is so vital to the general effect on the stage that a dramatist is easily apt to overdo the physical individuality of character. I cannot truly feel that Cyrano de Bergerac makes his greatest impression with his preposterous nose or Falstaff with his girth. Falstaff may have been given his paunch because it mutely belies his boasted prowess, and he may have been so conceived merely to fit the actor who originally played him; and on the other hand he may have it for the same reason Cyrano has his nose. Cyrano seems to have his celebrated "sign of an affable, kind, courteous, witty, liberal, courageous man" because it is a traditional feature of that ancient stage personage, the Captain in the harlequinade, of which character Cyrano quite certainly is but a sympathetic rendition.

Differentiation becomes a really difficult problem when there are many characters in the play. There is a limit of time in which the play may be acted, that does not allow for detailed portraiture of all the figures concerned. Here the dramatist must economize, as usual. He must discriminate between the purely plot characters, or those whose actions actually carry on the play, and those which exist merely for matters of detail. These last-named characters obviously do not require prolonged attention; and they may be individualized in swift, sketchy strokes. In truth, the audience really prefers to have them handled so. Too much attention bestowed upon a minor character leads the spectator to expect greater things from it than the plot will justify, and so will disappoint sorely when it is found that the character has come to so little.

Thus the delineation of minor figures is a matter largely for the judgment and taste of the dramatist. He will find his surest models in this respect in those classical plays having spectacular elements—the dramas of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Beaumont and Fletcher, and in modern times certain

works of Sardou and his contemporaries, and of Boucicault and his. Notice the definition and manipulation of the many minor characters in the opening scenes of "Cyrano de Bergerac." See how they pay for themselves in individual contributions to the action. Note, in particular, the pick-pocket, whose apprehension while plying his trade, leads him to reveal that Lignière is to be attacked by a hundred men at the Port de Nesle. This pickpocket serves to point the moral that no character should be made conspicuous by character differentiation unless he is to become extraordinarily useful in developing the play.

CONSISTENCY

THE peculiarity or bent of a man's mind is the bent of his convictions. He acts thus and so because he believes—through instinct, impulse, or reason—that it is the proper course to pursue. The force that he brings to his action, whatever the action may be, is in proportion to the strength of his individuality or character, and to that extent he becomes admirable, or at least interesting. In endeavoring to support his convictions through a course of circumstances he necessarily maintains for a period a single habit of mind, relinquishing it only when he becomes convinced that another frame of mind is better; and this sustained attitude is what we call consistency. It is the way in which a character really maintains its identity.

In order to derive the interest that there may be in seeing a character struggle to hold to his convictions, it is generally valuable to reveal to the audience at the very outset just what his convictions are. This is striking the keynote of character, or giving the audience a basis of judgment for considering that character's acts as they occur. The character of the gambler-sheriff, Jack Rance, in Belasco's "The Girl of the Golden West," is established at the very beginning as that of a square man trusted by "the Girl." It is his "motivation." He has a philosophy which persuades him ever "to walk in the open road with my face in the sun and to stick by the cyards." When the mob is about to

lynch Raminnez at his direction, the audience is appreciative to have him recall that he cut cards fairly with the Girl for the outlaw's life, that she won, and that his code of "sticking by the cyards" requires that Raminnez be released. Even the irresolution that permitted him to slip for a moment has been "planted" earlier (for keynote and motivation really are but forms of preparation), for once, overcome with passion, he seized the Girl, only to release her with an apology, saying, "I didn't think I was that dangerous!" The gambling habit which leads him to cut cards with the Girl for the outlaw's life also has been "keyed," or "planted" or "motivated," by his early bet of a hundred dollars "that the fly on Shorty's nose will go to the left." Making entirely reasonable his surrender to the Girl when she persuades him to cut the cards by saying that she is asking this of Rance the gambler, instead of Rance the sheriff, which he now claims to be.

Seeking another instance of keynote as applied to character, I think of the opening scene of Knoblock's gorgeous play, "Kismet," in which Hajj, the beggar, betrays himself to the audience by awakening from an insolently healthy sleep, snoring loudly, upon a slab beside the door of the Mosque of the Carpenters, to utter his shrewd professional whine to the first passerby of the new day, "Alms for the love of Allah!"

Consistency of character is vital to the power of its impression, unless the desired impression is that the character is inconsistent; and even then, as Aristotle says in his "Poetics" (XV), it should be consistently inconsistent.

Shakespeare's characters are marvels of consistency. That is one small reason actors are fond of them, and one small reason they are vivid. In "Much Ado About Nothing" (Act I, Sc. 3), Don John is found to be quite outspoken on the point. He is a villain on general principles. "I had rather be a canker in a hedge," he says, "than a rose in his grace; and it better fits my blood to be disdained of all, than to fashion a carriage to rob love from many; in this, though, I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man, it must not be denied that I am a plain-dealing villain. . . .

In the meantime, let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me."

Austin Dobson has pointed out many weak points in characters of Goldsmith's "She Stoops to Conquer." For instance, "Tony Lumpkin, who in Act III is so illiterate as not to be able to read more than his own name in script, is clever enough in Act I to have composed the excellent song of 'The Three Pigeons.'" George Henry Nettleton adds to this that the conception of Marlow as a lion among maids and a sheep among ladies, is very unconvincing.

Note the thoroughly consistent reasoning of each of the three suitors of Portia, in the famous casket scene of "The Merchant of Venice." Observe how Miranda, in Act I of "The Tempest," waking after her charmed sleep, begins speaking with the last idea she had before relapsing into slumber.

See the consistency of the remark of Rageneau, the pastry-cook in "Cyrano de Bergerac," "I feel weak as a napkin!" Consider how, in the jealousy of Hermia, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," her sensitiveness about her height becomes an issue. The King, in "Hamlet," feeling in himself the State, never fails to refer to himself as "we" and "us." And read this, from Act III, sc. 2 of "As You Like It":

ORLANDO. Where dwell you, pretty youth?

ROSALIND. With this shepherdess, my sister, here in the skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat.

Even with Rosalind in habiliments of a boy, Shakespeare did not forget her feminine habit of mind.

NAMES

Now that it has been established that mere labels are poor means of distinguishing dramatic characters, the matter of labels may be given some consideration. This word is not altogether a figure of speech, for in certain medieval morality plays, characters actually bore their names upon their breasts in the form of labels.

That, however, was the time when allegories were popular, and characters personifying vices and virtues held the stage. In those circumstances it was but natural that the vices and virtues should be called by their own names; and that it might be done with great effectiveness is witnessed by the fine old play "Everyman." The same period offers plenty of examples of another obvious naming of human character which is to mark it with the name of its calling. Thus, in "The Playe Called the Foure PP," the *dramatis personæ* records, "A Planter, A Pardoner, A Potycary and A Pedler." And of approximately the same date, namely along about the middle of the sixteenth century in England, may be found that third elementary mode of labeling which is to name a character after its outstanding trait. Nicholas Udall's "Roister Doister," which is hailed as the first native English comedy, affords instances in virtually all its characters, the list embracing, "Tristram Trustie, Dobinet Doughtie, Tom Trupenie, Margerie Mumblecrust and Tibet Talkapace." The additional virtue of alliteration here is too apparent to require comment.

We have, then, at this early time, the various major forms of naming play characters—including the same method that gives us "A. Dough Nutt," "M. T. Head," "Heeza Chump" in the program of the ordinary "musical comedy." There is no real point in multiplying instances, because the veriest nitwit can manufacture them by the hour for himself. It will be more helpful to refer briefly to those names that purport to belong to persons in actual life.

I recall reading somewhere in a book or a play review, a burst of enthusiasm over the happy naming of Sam Eccles in the old play "Caste," declaring that he simply couldn't have been called anything else.⁵ Now I regret that my imagination does not carry me that far, for if he had been named Muggins I probably would have enjoyed his portrayal just as much; but it is a fact that some names "belong" much better than others.

⁵ I am embarrassed now to discover that I read it in Archer's "Play-Making," a book that I much admire for its good sense and splendid literary style. The author provides in the same place, however (p. 76 ff.), many useful notes on nomenclature in general.

The guide to a fitting name for a character is usually just a "feel" for it. In the broad view of course any one knows that Schuyler Van Tassel is not a normal name for a prize-fighter, or Axel Peterson for a French Count; but there are finer decisions to make than these—and the basis for making them is much the same as the basis for good taste in general. The "feel" is not likely to be even a matter of common agreement. I once dubbed a young woman character in a play "Janice" and had other characters refer to her as "Jan;" but the diminutive made a virtual shudder of dislike come over a certain manager every time he heard it. So I changed the name to "Georgiana," known to friends as "Georgie," which served my purpose equally well. In another case a producer changed the name of my operetta heroine from "Helen" to "Doris" because a young lady of that name was just then engaging his attention; but I didn't agree with the substitution that time simply because "Doris" emphatically is less of a singable word than "Helen"—which I grant you is bad enough.

This brings up the matter of choosing names that may be articulated clearly by the actors. Offhand I cannot recall details, but I know that I frequently have heard actors falter in their lines because of the difficulty of uttering names awkward to say. Sometimes names of this kind are bestowed with the idea of obtaining laughs through their repetition; but the device is a poor one and soon wears itself out to the point of irritation.

Great dramatists and critics have given thought to this subject—not much thought because the subject doesn't deserve it; but every once in a while one encounters in their work a note of impatience or caution. For instance, Lessing (in No. 8 of his "Dramatic Notes") objects strenuously because Herr Heufeld, of Vienna, author of the play, "Julie, or the Conflict Between Love and Duty," has changed the name St. Preux into Siegmund which Lessing claims "savors of the footman." In another direction we behold the "spontaneous writer" Richard Brinsley Sheridan worrying through a long list of names before finally settling on the one he wants. In Moore's "Life of Sheridan" it is re-

lated that in finding the name Charles Surface, its author went through Clerimont, Florival, Captain Harry Plausible, Harry Pliant or Pliable, Young Harrier and Frank, while Joseph Surface was at one time Tom.

Going over the list of characters in successful contemporary plays one is readily impressed with the usual simplicity of the names which are generally easy to say and to remember, even if they are not always felicitous. Where these names come from is difficult to state; but the chances are that they are suggested by easy and very convenient associations. I once had a writer on staff who startled me by picking for the name of his villain that of an honest rug manufacturer whose sign was painted on a building in plain view of my office window. He had noted it while in conference with me one day and blithely put it down. Signboards give many such clues, while the familiar telephone book is in this respect a source of much plunder.

For my own plays I used to keep an extensive card-index of names that had impressed me as useful material, revised and augmented from time to time; but I found that my own views of names that were good changed from play to play—and all I value now is the list of Christian names for men and women that I copied long ago out of an old school dictionary.

If a man trains himself to capture his own thoughts, he will find that when he is trying to think of a name for a character, he commonly has in mind certain sound combinations that in themselves would be useless; but once they are put down on paper it frequently happens that a name may be discovered that will fairly approximate them. That was where I found my card-index of surnames handiest. I would say to myself, "This fellow's name is something like 'udge' and 'em,'" or, "That one's suggests itself to me as 'whee'"—out of which by some mysterious process of reason while riffling through the cards, I might ultimately derive "Huggins" and "Creel." I mention it as a workable method that may have value now to some one else. Another way to start a profitable train of thought is to consider the probable

ancestry of the unnamed character and then select a name that would naturally have reached him at birth.

Especial care should be exercised, however, in nationality names. A history of a given country is an excellent place to look for them; but it is best to lift out characteristic forms and endings of surnames rather than any specific words, because just a small slip might result in giving offense to one who prefers that the names of his national heroes shall go unshared with creatures of fiction.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

GRANTING that the differentiation and the individuality of characters in a play is highly desirable, we may pass from the general to the particular and consider what goes to make up the interesting individual.

The term character is used very loosely by most people. We speak of upright or notorious characters and have much to say about character-building in our schools. Were we to be pinned down to a definition of character in any of these cases, however, it is doubtful that we could give off-hand one with much point to it.

PERSONALITY

WHEN we speak of "a character" in life, we commonly understand an eccentric person rather than one embodying the several virtues; it is only when we add a word and say, "a *noble* character," or "an *evil* character," that the mental picture becomes fairly definite. As a matter of fact, the world has no common agreement as to the specific nature of character. The qualities comprising it in Lincoln are not precisely similar to those in Washington—an observation equally true of the character of William Pitt as compared with that of Gladstone. Yet, all four possessed character to a high degree. So far as I have been able to discover, character in life means only individuality; and when we urge it upon our children, we are merely exhorting them to be distinctive, or different from all others in the rank and file, when they grow up. Indeed, etymologically speaking, the very root of the word (the Greek verb meaning "to scratch") refers only to a distinguishing mark.

This line of reasoning seems to indicate that character is personality, in the sense of having exceptional qualities; but however true this may be in life, it is far from a complete definition in the modern theater where some of the most vital characters are utterly commonplace. Bill Jones of "Lightnin'," is infinitely dearer to the twentieth century than *Cædipus Rex*, although in the days of "*Cædipus Rex*" it was held that exceptional persons were the only material of which great dramatic heroes might be made.¹ Why should this be?

What probably has happened is that in the course of the centuries the word "character," like many another, has broadened its meaning. In the time of Aristotle it is likely that the only character worthy of the name in public estimation was a man of renown, whereas in later ages artists gradually discovered the appeal of genre pictures and unveiled characters among the lowly. Perhaps psychologists sometime will trace the change to a growth of sensibility—the same civilized development that has humanized laughter—and so call even this fact to witness that Man really has progressed since the Year One.

In brief, the term "character" in the theater to-day, does not refer *merely* to an exceptional person. The modern theater does not demand of its characters remarkable stations in life as a way of evoking interest of an audience. It leaves them, rather, a wide choice of means, provided only that the aforementioned interest actually *is* aroused. Lessing, in his "Dramatic Notes" (No. 14), explains it thus: "The misfortune of those whose circumstances most resemble our own, must naturally penetrate most deeply into our hearts; and if we pity kings, we pity them as human beings, not as kings. Though their position often renders their misfortunes more important, it does not make them more interesting. Whole nations may be involved in them; but our sympathy requires an individual object and a State is far too much an abstract conception to touch our feelings." Beaumarchais, in his "Essay on the Serious Drama," goes so far as to say: "The

¹"He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous,—a personage like *Cædipus*, *Thyestes*, or other illustrious men of such families. . . . Tragedy is an imitation of persons who are above the common level."—Aristotle, "Poetics," XIII and XV, Butcher's translation.

true heart-interest, the real relationship, is always between man and man, and not between man and king. And, so far from increasing my interest in the characters of tragedy, their exalted rank rather diminishes it."

It would appear that character, in the dramatic sense at least, is the outward manifestation of individual thought. This definition gives us the assertion of will, individuality and consistency. Although it may be incomplete, it will suffice for the present, as a basis for more extended discussion.

When a novice at playwriting is at all conscientious, he begins to characterize his people by piling up their qualities. In this he does not differ greatly from certain hack dramatists—rather commoner in screen work—who do their writing altogether along conventional lines without taking the trouble to consider underlying principles. We are shown that the hero is good to his mother, fond of children, charitable to beggars, generous to enemies, humane to animals, and so forth and so forth, in as many instances; but when these elements have no real bearing on the point of the play as a whole, the method is not good characterization.

THE DOMINANT TRAIT

It is not good because it is building up character from outside itself, instead of unfolding it naturally from within where all real character—in life or in the theater—begins. The only outside knowledge possessed by the world concerning Daniel Defoe is an advertisement offering a reward for his arrest; yet the world has built up a clear portrait of the man from the internal evidences of his immortal work. Dragging in outside elements in this way means digression while they are being considered; and anything that interrupts the continuity of thought in a play necessarily is disruptive of interest in it.

But even having all these qualities carefully woven into the fabric of the drama does not necessarily provide striking character. Character has purpose; and purpose subordinates all qualities that do not contribute to it. A strong purpose necessarily is single; to divide it is to weaken it. The hero

may seek to accomplish many things, but out of these there should be one that dominates and the realization of which is the essential achievement. "It is still to be observed," said Dryden very truly in his "Troilus and Cressida" preface, "that one virtue, vice and passion ought to be shown in every man as predominant over all the rest, as covetousness in Crassus, love of his country in Brutus, and the same in characters which are feigned."

The principles that have been discussed in present pages have been evoked not from the theater but from life, because, as has been said or implied so many times, the real source of all dramatic method is the audience. Here, again, therefore, we are able to attest a current truth by referring to the constitution of the human mind. William James's "Psychology," discussing the "rivalry and conflict of the different Me's," proceeds in these words: "With most objects of desire, physical nature restricts our choice to but one of many represented goods, and even so it is here. I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a *bon-vivant*, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a 'tone-poet' and a saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's work would run counter to the saint's; the *bon-vivant* and the philanthropist would trip each other up; the philosopher and the lady-killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay. Such different characters may conceivably at the outset of life be alike *possible* to a man. But to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed. So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation. All other selves thereupon become unreal, but the fortunes of this self are real."

In dramatic portraiture, at least, we do not aim to give a photographic reproduction of a living person. We select certain phases of character that seem best to illustrate the

subject in hand, without intentionally misrepresenting the fact that the character has other phases richly illustrating other subjects. The anonymous author of that classic character of the nursery, Little Jack Horner, thus utilized certain features for his particular account of the boy, which did not in any way conflict with the hypothetical portrait that Heywood Broun subsequently drew of him in his column in the *New York Morning World*.² The Admirable James Crichton, the Scaligers, Leonardo da Vinci and Francis Bacon are among the most versatile men known to history, but every scholarly appraisal finds in each some outstanding quality. Our own Benjamin Franklin is variously admired as statesman, philosopher, scientist, and humanist, which phase to place first being purely a matter of opinion; but all of his biographers readily enough concede the importance of placing one phase first by trying to do it.

The great artistic principle of *selection* was clearly seen by that curiously uneven critic, Richard Hurd, Bishop of Worcester, to whose glory is credited the remark that the Nature imitated by the poet is not the Nature of science and experience but the nature of the poetical world itself. Lessing, in No. 93 of his "Dramatic Notes," quotes Hurd in these words: "In portraits of character, as we may call those that give a picture of the manners, the artist, if he be of real ability, will not go to work on the possibility of an abstract idea. All he intends to show is that some quality predominates; and this he images strongly, and by such signatures as are most conspicuous in the operation of the leading passion. And when he hath done this, we may, in common speech or in compliment, if we please, to his art, say of such a portrait that it images to us not the man but the passion; just as the ancients observed of the famous statue of Apollodorus by Silarion, that it expressed not the angry Apollodorus, but his passion of anger. . . . For the rest he treats his subject as he would any other; that is, he represents the concomitant affections, or considers merely that general symmetry and proportion which are expected in a human figure. . . . Shakespeare,

² About the middle of February, 1925. Apropos of Winifred Sackville Stoner's charge that the Horner boy set the nursery a disgraceful example.

we may observe, is in this as in all other more essential beauties of a drama, a perfect model. If the discerning reader peruse attentively his comedies with this view, he will find his best-marked characters discoursing through a great deal of their parts just as any other, and only expressing their essential and leading qualities occasionally, and as circumstances occur to give an easy exposition to them."

The readiness with which an actor may single out a leading idea in the rôle assigned him, frequently is the measure of his interest in it. In his own lingo it is "something to get his teeth into." With this outstanding quality of the character to guide him he will work out all its possibilities. But when the characterization is diffuse, the figure is hazy and impossible for him to conceive; and its effectiveness is ruined to just that degree.

WHEN AND HOW TO INTRODUCE

HAVING conceived the character with due proportion and emphasis, just when is the author to begin characterizing him? The obvious answer is, at once. The matter of striking the keynote of character at the outset already has been mentioned. The question of *when* to introduce a character is less obviously answered, for the flip response, "as necessary," means nothing at all. In fact, a character may be introduced long before he is needed by the story—as I think was the case with the burglar in "Seven Days;" or he may be produced on the very spur of the moment, as the apothecary in "Romeo and Juliet" or the grave-diggers in "Hamlet."

One of the traditions of playwriting is to introduce all the important characters at the beginning of the play. In Belasco's remarkable drama, "The Return of Peter Grimm," the essential characters have made themselves known to the audience soon after the rise of the curtain on the first act. There is old Peter, himself, moving about his pleasant household; then Kathrien, his ward; next Frederick, his worthless nephew whom he wants Kathrien to marry; next in order is the man she loves, James Hartman; Dr. MacPherson, the dabbler in spiritualism, follows; then little Willem, the sickly

child who is to be the medium of communication a little later with the world beyond.

With many dramatists this practice is mere convention; but it is rooted deep in sound principle because those characters that express the plot necessarily belong to the premises out of which the play action grows. Because of this, for an important plot character to make its first appearance after the precipitating act of the proposition is symptomatic of poor structure with a corresponding loss of effectiveness. It must be noted, however, that it is not always expedient to introduce a plot character early. The actress, Kara, in *Esmond's "When We Were Twenty-One,"* is not seen until the second act because she could not consistently be obtruded into the fine home atmosphere of the first; and this is well. She is very thoroughly mentioned, however, in the first act. The caution is given not to insist on crowding all the central characters into Act One, but merely to see that they all have been presented when the play proper begins—which is to say, by the time of the precipitating act. Incidental characters are quite another matter, and may be introduced almost anywhere and at any time at the discretion of the dramatist.

ENTRANCES AND EXITS

WHEN Ludwig Fulda visited this country in 1913, that distinguished German dramatist told me that the most striking thing he had observed in witnessing our native plays was that there was no motive, no preparation, in the entrances and exits of character, and this he described as an inexcusable carelessness. His point was well taken; and yet undue emphasis frequently is put upon this phase of playwriting. It is true that when character appears on the scene it should have reason for coming, as well as for going at that particular time that suits the convenience of the dramatist. At the same time, to build up elaborate excuses is often apt to be more disruptive of interest than to take the given entrance or exit for granted.

In the last act of Porter Emerson Browne's "*The Spendthrift*," virtually all of the principals other than the heroine

Act 3, p.24.

RAJA: might muse you to see it at work. (~~Watkins is just going to~~
(Contd.)

~~send out a message.~~ Would Mrs. Crespin care to come?

CRESPIN: (Off-stage) Yes - why not? Will you come Lucilla?

Lucilla goes down-stage end of arch. Crespin precedes them to up C, where they make a group examining the apparatus. The Raja in the centre, Lucilla left of him, Traherne and Crespin right of him, Watkins standing

Raja: (as they come) (Watkins is just going to send out a message)
The Raja, in a few words, sets forth the chief features

of the apparatus, then:

RAJA: (All ready, Watkins.) (To the others) (Won't you sit down?)

They seat themselves, Lucilla behind the writing-table,

Traherne in the up-stage chair, Crespin in the down-stage

chair. X Raja sits on down-stage end of arch

(To Watkins) You have the order for Tashkent? X

WATKINS: (Producing the yellow slip) Yes, your 'Ighness; but I 'aven't coded it.

RAJA: Oh, never mind, send it in clear.

Courtesy of Winthrop Ames

FROM THE PROMPT COPY OF "THE GREEN GODDESS"

Attention is called especially to the manner in which the producer has gained greater effectiveness by judicious delays in stage directions and by changing the order of precedence in certain bits of business. William Archer wrote other plays, but this splendid melodrama, so beautifully rendered by Winthrop Ames as producer and George Arliss as star, definitely vindicated his right to speak as a critic of the drama.

happen into her furnished room together on the flimsy pretext that they all were passing in an automobile. This is rather incredible; but the play is so near the finish at this time that the audience shrugs its shoulders in a manner of speaking, and passes it by. For careful motivation and preparation for entrances and exits of character there are no better illustrations than may be found in the plays of Ibsen. In the opening of "A Doll's House" Nora comes in when she does simply because she is the mistress of the house and naturally is in the habit of coming and going. On the other hand Dr. Rank's coming is carefully motivated. Nora asks, "Have you remembered to ask Dr. Rank?" And her husband replies: "No. It's hardly necessary. He'll dine with us as a matter of course. Besides, I'll invite him when he drops in to-day." Later in the action the bell rings offstage. The maid presently explains to Nora that it was Dr. Rank and that he has gone on into her husband's study. There are many other advantages in this arrangement; but the point here is to illustrate the fact that Ibsen knew when and when not to take entrances for granted.

The structure of the plot and scenario has made it necessary for successive rearrangements of the characters. Individuals must come and go arbitrarily at specified times. The dramatist must hide the purely technical reasons with human motives that develop naturally out of his material. Sometimes it is necessary to have a character absent himself that he may not hear something revealed by other characters in a subsequent scene; sometimes, again, the character may have exhausted his present interest value and must be removed merely because the stage should have no inactive elements. One of the requirements likely to try the resourcefulness of the dramatist is generally to avoid leaving the stage empty, or, in all events, devoid of some sort of interest—for an empty room seen by the audience for the first time, may have in its mere decoration, many elements of interest.³ He must be

³ "Very seldom should the stage remain without some one speaking, because the crowd becomes restless in these intervals and the story spins itself out to great length; for, besides its being a great defect, the avoidance of it increases grace and artifice."—Lope de Vega, "The New Art of Writing Plays in This Age."

alert when the incoming character cannot meet the outgoing one without wrecking the story, and at the same time either one or the other must be in evidence. These are all minor problems that the dramatist must solve for himself along common sense lines.

"Here he comes now" is a form of preparation for the entrance of character that has become so hackneyed that audiences laugh indulgently when they hear it. It is hoary with age. Nevertheless it stands for a respectable practice much admired by John Dryden in his celebrated "Essay of Dramatic Poesy." Dryden there described certain technical excellences in Ben Jonson's "Epicoene, or The Silent Woman," waxing enthusiastic, then, over other plays by the same author, in this wise: "There is another artifice of the poet, which I cannot here omit, because of the frequent practice of it in his comedies he has left it to us almost as a rule; that is, when he has any character or humour wherein he would shew a *coup de maître*, or his highest skill, he recommends it to your observation by a pleasant description of it before the person first appears. Thus, in 'Bartholomew Fair' he gives you the pictures of Numps⁴ and Cokes, and in this those of Daw, Lafoole, Morose, and the Collegiate Ladies; all which you hear described before you see them. So that before they come upon the stage, you have a longing expectation of them, which prepares you to receive them favorably; and when they are there even from the first appearance you are so far acquainted with them, that nothing of their humour is lost to you."

Certainly to hear interesting facts about a person as yet unseen is provocative; and out of this fact speedily developed a practice of having the most important character talked about generously before he actually arrived. In the "star" plays of the middle of the nineteenth century the device was carried to absurd lengths so that when the star finally appeared he entered at the peak of extravagant eulogy and even with elaborate orchestral accompaniment.

⁴ William Strunk, Jr., notes, in his edition of "Dryden's Essays on the Drama," that Numps's character is not revealed before his entrance in Jonson's play, although that of Cokes is.

Inducing the younger dramatists of the succeeding generation to believe that a leading character had to be completely described by the supporting figures before his first entrance, that he might come on full grown like Pallas Athene from the head of Jove. Here is the occasion for that momentous question, should character make its appearance full grown, or may it be developed afterward?

The answer is, yes—and no. The initial appearance of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, in Rostand's play of that name, is elaborately built up. On the contrary, the acting version of Goethe's "*Faust*" discovers its hero in his study with the rise of the curtain, unheralded and unsung. The opening conversation in "*Hamlet*" has mainly to do with the ghost, and the melancholy prince appears with scant introduction. And whereas *Hedda Gabler* is discussed for a full fifteen minutes before one sees her, *Peer Gynt*, in another of Ibsen's plays, is on the stage from the first.

The reason I say yes, is that every character should come forth with its full complement of qualities as a human being. The reason I say no, is that characters necessarily continue to grow in the course of circumstances as the play goes on, and strictly speaking, no one of them is full grown until the play is at an end.

CHANGES OF FEELING

IF IT is true that audiences are interested primarily in fluid, flowing events, if it is true that the spectator enjoys seeing characters exercise their wills in choices of alternatives, if it is true that character is at its best in pursuit of a purpose—and there are ample reasons in foregoing pages to justify a belief that they are—then it is true that characterization in itself requires a progressive story.

We want not only to see character in action as it manifests choice by casting the weight of its volition with one alternative or another, but also to see that volition change the whole situation as a result of it, and the character itself to become modified in reacting to the altered conditions at large. It is the force of circumstance that presents character with

alternatives and that ultimately shapes character anew that leads Aristotle to declare in his "Poetics" (VI), that plot is of more importance than character. He points out that character merely determines men's qualities; "but it is by their actions (i. e., the plot) that they are made happy or the reverse."

That people of our own day are primarily interested in psychological processes was an observation of Strindberg in the preface to his play, "Countess Julie"—although he might well have remarked it in all ages that enjoyed the theater. He tries to explain it by saying that, "Our souls, so eager for knowledge, cannot rest satisfied with seeing what happens, but must also learn how it comes to happen. What we want to see are just the wires, the machinery. We want to investigate the box with the false bottom, touch the magic ring in order to find the future, and look into the cards to discover how they are marked."

The processes that all audiences want to see are the mental ones—expressed in terms of physical action—by which, and as a result of which, character develops. In order to be seen in action character *must* develop. The pleasant uncertainty of the character's action is due to its free will. In order to exercise volition character must have purpose. The strength of that purpose is in proportion to the difficulties to be surmounted in achieving it. Obstacles mean opposition; and opposition is the life of drama. This identity of effective character with the essentials of all dramatic effect may be reasoned in various ways, but always with the same result: Characters must be creatures of free will, revealed in action—which implies purpose and volition expressed against opposition—and development—because progress in achievement of purpose necessarily is change of condition.

In Aristotle's "Poetics" (XIII), he speaks very specifically of the "change of fortune" that must take place in the represented career of the hero; and this might well be a recommendation for all characters, important and unimportant, for any object of interest whatsoever must have change,⁵

⁵ See the elaborate discussion of this point in Chapter V, "The Audience Decides."

either in its nature or in its implications, in order to be interesting. The reason the hypocrite—the prohibitionist secretly imbibing, the braggart soldier afraid of his own shadow, etc.—is so popular as a dramatic character is that he shows character mobile, in action, even if he is not developed in the best way through force of plot circumstances.⁶ See the changes wrought in the various characters of "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*"—Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius and Helena—when placed under the spell of Puck. See also the change in Titania, herself. See how they argue their emotions and at the same time remain consistent. In "*The Tempest*," observe the original fear of the monster, Caliban, on the part of Trinculo, gradually growing into contempt. In "*All's Well That Ends Well*," notice the interest in Parolles, the chronic boaster who confesses the strength of his army to the supposed enemies who really are his own comrades.

The pleasure of seeing change in character is deeply rooted in human nature and is by no means confined to the theater. We like to say "Boo!" to a baby for the sake of seeing its reaction, or to surprise our loved ones with unexpected gifts primarily to be present at their demonstrations of pleasure. Not only that, but we, ourselves, delight in experiencing change. We like the unexpected. We seek "thrills" and "sensations."

So do the great characters of any period of the theater undergo changes. Appearing on the scene full grown so far as their original attitude is concerned, they abandon this position either through compulsion or choice in the course of the action. Peter Grimm, established at the outset as bent on the marriage of his grateful ward, Kathrien, to Frederick,

⁶ Certain characters recur over and over again in the theater not because of public demand but because persons of the theater take advantage of the stage to strike at their enemies. Theatrical representation of the hypocritical minister, so much resented by the clergy as untrue to life, is thus only a heritage of the ranting antagonism of the church; and it will continue just as long as the church remains the aggressor. Doran, in his "*Annals of the English Stage*" (Vol. I, p. 22), observes that when Shakespeare was about ten years old, "the players were treated as the devil's missionaries; and such unsavory terms were flung at them and at playwrights, by the city aldermen and the county justices, that thereon was founded that animosity which led dramatic authors to represent citizens and justices as the most egregious of fools, the most arrant of knaves, and the most deluded of husbands."

his nephew, and with Kathrien's consent to this arrangement won, discovers after his death that Frederick is unworthy of the girl and that her own heart's choice, young Hartman, really deserves her hand. Old Peter labors, then, against all the barriers to communication from the world beyond, to stop the culmination of his own earthly plan, and, at last succeeding in bringing about the just arrangement, goes happily off into the unknown as the final curtain falls.

It is observable that nearly every great character of drama makes but a single change of front, because that change is so momentous that the mere account of it constitutes the whole drama. To be momentous, a change must be wrought with difficulty—difficulty due possibly to the fact that the character has many obstacles to overcome, as in the case of Peter Grimm, or that he, himself, is so hard-headed, as in the case of the father in Githa Sowerby's "Rutherford and Son," that only terrific storm and stress of circumstances can shake him from his original position.

We are inclined to think, therefore, that strength of character means, generally, a good deal of settled conviction on the part of the character. Quite certainly characters that have depth are that way. But interest in them is tinged with admiration. They are great persons. On the other hand, there is another kind of interest that belongs to constantly changing characters, shallow persons, like Becky Warder, in Clyde Fitch's comedy, "The Truth"—interest shot through with sympathy and maybe tinged with contempt—although, so far as Becky is concerned, her experience makes her a trifle more responsible at the end. In these latter cases, however, one may notice that the circumstances shape the characters rather than the reverse. Which kind is the more worth-while? The former by all odds, I think.

So perhaps Aristotle and his followers are right after all, about exceptional persons being the best subjects of great drama. In all events, the matter invites a wide range of opinion. Weather-vane characters that turn about with every puff of circumstance arouse pity and contempt in real life; on the stage they can do little more, it would seem, unless they are blessed with sincere reformation. Making the

question whether audiences find their highest theatrical pleasure in admiring greatness of soul or in the entomological delight of dissecting butterflies.

But a character that is the toy of circumstance, no less than one who shapes events through the force of his own genius, must reveal itself. "On the stage we want to see who the people are," says Lessing in his "Dramatic Notes" (No. 9); "and we can see it only from their actions. The goodness with which we are to credit them, merely upon the word of another, cannot possibly interest us in them."⁷ Once again, it is what a character *does* that interests us, rather than what moves him to do it. In this it does not follow that the character is obliged to make his own estimate of himself. Indeed, few men know enough about themselves to make an accurate summing-up. A stingy man is apt to believe himself the soul of generosity, excusing his penuriousness by calling it frugality; the true portrait is drawn by his associates who see the evidence of his actions. Even if the stingy man appreciates his failing and tells about it, his associates still will prefer their own conclusions.

So it is that the audience likes to apprehend, to divine, for itself. This active coöperation of the audience is what the dramatist should seek constantly to arouse, for without it interest will languish and die. When a playwright is able to write a scene in which he makes a character reveal the fact that he is thinking one thing while saying something contradictory, then he may say that he is beginning to understand the higher powers of characterization.

⁷ An apparent contradiction is the celebrated Mrs. Grundy, in Morton's "Speed the Plough," who never once is seen upon the stage. Another instance is the "title-rôle" of George Ade's playlet, "Nettie," produced at the Princess Theater, New York, in 1914.

CHAPTER XXX

ON PARADE

IN drama we are dealing, in a sense, with just the externality of character. That is, in order to "put across" inner processes of mind, we must interpret them so that they are in evidence without description. Probably this is just another indication of the great importance of the objective, visual method in the theater.

The bellboy in the hotel scene, holds out his hand for a tip. The needy adventurer feels in his pocket for a coin, and pulling the pocket inside out without result, remembers that he has none, and turning his back upon the boy, pretends preoccupation in brushing his hair. The boy makes a face and departs. This banal situation has been staged innumerable times, possibly because it is basically "good theater"—for it does illustrate the dramatic habit of mind that provides first-hand clues to the intimate thoughts of the persons concerned. The absent-minded professor who, in trying to prepare his own breakfast, puts his watch into the boiling water and the egg into his pocket; the undeclared lover, who, in the presence of his adored one, trips over his own feet; the fortune-hunter who suddenly cools in his affection when he learns that the one he professed to care for passionately is penniless—all these are admirable in a way, as hackneyed as they are, because they employ legitimate forms of characterization.

CHARACTER REPRESSION

TO CREATE these opportunities for character to reveal itself requires a situation in which there are elements of opposition. The conflict of feelings which is symptomatic of the

interesting change in character, creates an internal ferment that causes the truth of the character to boil over into view, so to speak. Life, itself, bears out the soundness of this. The great characters of history have become great because their interests and passions have been shut up in them, and have proved themselves only when those interests and passions have burst the seals with all the gathering force of their pent-up power.

Character is like the growing plant: Keep cutting back the parts that reach upward into the air and sunlight, and the obstructed energy will not be destroyed, but will reverse its action and go down into the greater development of a system of roots, out of sight of the cruel world, that the new shoots may have sufficient vigor to withstand the next onslaught. So human character, shut up within itself, becomes more intense and individual, some day to burst forth like a blinding flash (to change the analogy), that in some circumstances may be spread to warm and cheer a great many chilled and cheerless souls, or that may blast with a single, concentrated bolt the present happiness of the world.

The repression creates and increases the reserve power; it makes the character grow and become strong enough to burst the very bonds that thus have evoked its strength; it produces the bursting, or the *expression*. Here, then, we have once more the matter of opposition as a dramatic principle, applied to a detail.

If it is true that character is best brought out by attempted repression of some kind, we have here, moreover, an explanation of why plays habitually show simple souls opposed by deep, crafty villains challenging them, taunting them, to throw their puny strength into battle for the right. We are better able to understand the wisdom of the plan of giving the villain all the good things at the opening of the play, because it makes the hero's job bigger—and the villain's fall greater. And lest we come to believe that the repression may come from the villain's dastardly acts alone, let it be said that it may come also from the mere situation. Consider in this connection the sorry plight of the Lord High Executioner in "The Mikado" when he finds that he is obliged to cut off a head.

"Being a humane man," he protests in so many words, "do you suppose that I would have taken the post of Lord High Executioner if I thought its duties were more than nominal?"

CHARACTER CONTRAST

THE element of contrast is a little different. It does not seem to evoke character expression; it merely heightens it. This is as true of contrasting acts of the same character, as it is of contrasting one character with another. Lessing found that out. "Diderot is right," he says ("Dramatic Notes," No. 86); "it is better if the characters are only different, not contrasted. Contrasted characters are less natural, and augment the romantic aspect that in any case is seldom lacking to dramatic events. For one gathering in common life wherein the contrast of character is shown as saliently as the dramatist demands, there are thousands where they are merely different. . . . It is also certain that those characters which in society seem merely different, contrast themselves of their own accord as soon as conflicting interests put them in motion. It is moreover quite natural that they should then be eager to seem yet more opposed than they really are. The vivacious man will be fire and flame against him who seems to be acting in a lukewarm manner, and the lukewarm man will be as cold as ice in order that the other may commit as many indiscretions as may eventually be useful to him."

The theater of Lessing's time, as well as before and after, attached great importance to the contrast of characters. "Foils," or characters serving primarily to heighten by contrast the effectiveness of star parts, have been common personages in virtually all popular plays for centuries. There is no better type of it than the famous *gracioso*, or comic servant of the old Spanish drama. There are also the familiar comic friend of the swashbuckling hero—so readily found in the dramas of Boucicault or for that matter in the comedies of Aristophanes—and the eccentric female attending the heroine—like the nurse in "Romeo and Juliet."

In modern times the better playwrights use contrast of character for all of its value, but less obviously. I know of

no more skillful employment of the device than in Carl Jacoby's "The Riddle: Woman," to which I have referred several times in earlier pages. There the author uses contrasting character to intensify his best emotions with strong theatrical effect. Every character in the play, save the heroine, Lilla, is used as a reflex, a contrast for a foreboding of some impending change in her career. Her younger sister, Karen, is a contrast in her love of luxury and also an intensification of her plight because the exposure of Lilla's shame will mean the loss of that luxury which she enjoys in Lilla's household. Lilla's friend, Kristine, parallels Lilla's shame and victimization by blackmail, and finally resorts to the solution contemplated by Lilla, shooting herself, thereby making Lilla's mere thought of suicide exceedingly tense. Of course, these instances are not, strictly speaking, illustrations of contrast as much as they are of comparison.

Comparison, as a dramatic principle, does not seem to have commanded much attention; but Jacoby's remarkable use of it shows that it would repay study. Which suggests at least one other interesting illustration. In "A Tale of Two Cities" Dickens certainly produced the impression of a happy ending despite the death of Sydney Carton on the guillotine, by having Darnay, who is subsequently joined to Lucie Manette, the girl Carton loved, the physical double of the unfortunate man. To all intents and purposes, therefore, at this period of the story, the man who dies is also the man who lives to be happy ever after. When comparisons between characters are very close—and in this case Darnay himself was sentenced to die on the guillotine—the identities readily and almost inevitably blend.

STAR PARTS

It is to be expected in almost any play that some one character will work its way into the focus of attention. Far front in this book (p. 73), in discussing the essentials of a good play, it was explained why it is useful to concentrate the action on, or have the action develop from, the fortunes of one character primarily. Principally, it makes for that de-

sirable quality, singleness of interest. The audience is enabled thereby to concentrate its attention and sympathy. And looking over all dramatic literature we find it in the main just a gallery of outstanding portraits, one to a play. There are the "Ædipus" of Sophocles; the "Medea" of Euripides; Don Sancho in Lope de Vega's "Star of Seville;" Corneille's "The Cid;" Racine's "Andromaque;" "The Miser," "The Misanthrope" and "Tartuffe" of Molière; "Hamlet," "Julius Cæsar," "King Lear," and "Richard III" of Shakespeare; "The Barber of Seville" of Beaumarchais; "Nathan the Wise" of Lessing; Goethe's "Faust;" Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell" and "Maria Stuart;" Victor Hugo's "Hernani" and "Ruy Blas;" Ibsen's "Brand," "Lady Inger of Östråt," and "John Gabriel Borkman;" and so on through the long, honored list in all times and nations.

The disposition of many modern critics to deprecate all star plays merely because of the abuse of the system by vain actors and actresses and hack dramatists, is thus essentially wrong; and star plays will continue to be made as long as there is a dramatic literature because it is eternally and legitimately the way to make good ones.

It is, let us say, rather, the *desirable* way to make good plays. There are times as in all other instances of the application of expert craftsmanship, when the expedient thing is to depart from the rule. This is not questioning the validity of the principle involved, but is merely sacrificing part of its benefit in order to derive a richer advantage from some exceptional circumstance in the material. This is what is meant by Genius breaking rules. Genius must first understand the principle that it may know just what it sacrifices, to precisely what extent the breaking of the rule penalizes, before it can make a profitable trade for another advantage.

When Shakespeare wrote "Romeo and Juliet," the nature of the case obliged him to have two stars; but the circumstances involved, of youth and thwarted love, of two persons so adoring that each shrinks from any thought of self being better or more important than the other, called for precisely the treatment he has given. Any analysis of the plot shows readily enough that although at first glance interest is divided

by having two persons, Romeo and Juliet are really one through their identity of spirit, fighting the same opposing influence, the ancient feud of Montagues and Capulets.

In Dryden's "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" Lisideius says: "It is impossible but that one person must be more conspicuous in a play than any other, and consequently the greatest share of the action must devolve upon him. We see it so in the management of all affairs; even in the most equal aristocracy, the balance cannot be so justly poised, but some one will be superior to the rest, either in parts, fortune, interest, or in the consideration of some glorious exploit; which will reduce the greatest part of business into his hands. But if we are to imagine that in exalting one character the rest of them are neglected, I desire him to produce any of Corneille's tragedies, wherein every person, like so many servants in a well-groomed family, has not some employment, and who is not necessary to the carrying on of the plot, or at least to your understanding of it."

Not only is the star play legitimate and right apart from the question of exploiting popular actors and actresses, but it is equally reasonable and proper for a dramatist to provide the occasion for publicly showing the talents of a great histrionic artist. The second chapter of Brander Matthews's fine book, "A Study of the Drama," is devoted to a consideration of the influence of the actor, and contains numerous illustrations of the fact that the cordial coöperation of dramatists and players has resulted in many great works.

The first practical consideration for a playwright undertaking to compose a vehicle for a star, is to gather under his eye those especial capabilities for which the player is celebrated, and then to devise a plot in which those resources may be fully utilized. If the star has conspicuous deficiencies, they must be reasonably masked or compensated for. It is said that Charles Kean went in for great spectacular effects in a day of long, sonorous, descriptive speeches, mainly to make up in other interest for his own irremediable weakness of voice. We have had many instances in the present century of brainless beauties who have held their places as public favorites because they have been surrounded with unusually

2-1-3

Count

I come with a message from our good friend Ferguson.

Mrs. Burgess (*eagerly*)

Yes—Where is Mr. Ferguson? I have been trying to get him all day.

Count

Yes Madam. He had to go to Baltimore this morning.

Ferguson heard that you had telephoned his office and asked me to tell you that he would be back on Monday. *Inferring time at the Balvedere*
~~We are going to amuse ourselves over the week-end.~~ ~~At the moment we are staying at the Balvedere.~~

But I thought, madam, it is not so important. Mr. Ferguson would return.
It is important—but I would not think of asking him to come here.
~~It is not so important.~~ ~~It is very kind of you to take so much trouble.~~ *I'll see him on Monday.*

Count

Trouble! I insisted on coming. It gave me a real excuse to come and pay my respects. I won't detain you any longer. I know you are not in the mood for visitors and my train leaves at 6.30. Au revoir.

(He takes her hand again and they walk up C)

Mrs. Burgess

(At the door)

It was charming of you to come, and I'm quite ashamed at having worn my heart on my sleeve.

Count

It is a good place for hearts. They do not break so easily *as when they are kept shut up.*

(At that moment Billy comes in from the street with his hat and coat on.
 He stops at doorway seeing Count)

Billy

Oh, how do you do?

Count

(Triumphantly)

Mr. Penderson: Am I right?

Billy

certainly
 Sure you are.

Count

(To Mrs. Burgess)

There—there you are Madam. Once again I remember the name of your first husband:

Courtesy of Kilbourn Gordon

COLLABORATION PAGE BY LESLIE HOWARD AND KILBOURN GORDON

From the first draft of a new play called "Survival." Most collaborators prefer to work alone and therefore alternate on successive stages of their play. Not so with Howard and Gordon. They sit opposite each other at a desk, each assuming a character, and then extemporize the lines while a stenographer records the conversation. When there are more than two characters the authors double as necessary. Mr. Gordon's earlier collaborations were with the late Chester de Vonde with whom he wrote "Kongo" and "Tia Juana." Howard is the author of "Murray Hill" and also an actor of note.

capable acting support. In another direction there was clever Ben Welch, once widely known as the star of "The Peddler." Few who saw his amusing vaudeville "turn" of late years, realized that the mock policeman who accompanied him and acted as "feeder," really was an attendant guiding him about the stage—for gay Ben Welch then was blind. The attendant was woven into the act as a legitimate part of it.

Will Rogers always has protested that he is not an actor. At the same time his original and rich personality is in public demand. When it was decided to star him in motion pictures in 1915 or thereabouts, Rex Beach was entrusted with the job of writing his first vehicle. It is said that Beach began by dissecting the visual appeal of the cowboy favorite, concluding that, visually speaking, Rogers had two remarkable qualities. One was his wonderful smile, and the other was his ability to look absolutely blank. Beach therefore made every turn in his plot depend upon one or the other of these expressions, and so gave the effect, in the resultant, successful film, "Laughing Bill Hyde," that Rogers was a powerful actor.

I do not mean by this that Rogers brought nothing else to his motion picture work. His human appeal is tremendously strong. But the anecdote does show what intelligent dramatic tailoring may do. So far as manufacturing the plot is concerned, by trying generally to tell the story from the viewpoint of the star and with reference to his abilities is perhaps the easiest way to establish sympathy for the part and suspense as to issue. To distort a story in which the chief part naturally belongs to a supporting actor, in order to make a starring vehicle out of a properly minor rôle, is an excellent start on the road to failure.

FULL VALUE

THE practical gain in rounding-out a star part is obvious. The need of developing minor characters is less so. A stage veteran is likely to say to this that the mere fact, that an actor has been engaged and is being paid salary for playing

a part, is sufficient reason for using his services to the full. To a certain extent this reduction of economic waste is valuable; but the dramatist will be better satisfied with an artistic reason. Any character that provides pleasure in the theater is an instrument that the playwright will be repaid for using to the limit—the limit being the extent to which this may be done without making the character disproportionate.

It is a painful and altogether disconcerting experience to the budding dramatist to discover that the actors to whom his parts have been assigned are not passive workers of his will, but are human beings, each considering his respective rôle, weighing its acting opportunities, and hoping for better things to do. But if he listens, carefully separating the wheat of sound principle from the chaff of such jealousies and swelling ambitions as there may be, the experience will be a rare lesson in characterization.

Probably for the first time he will see that a given character, detached from the context, does absolutely nothing but walk around the table and ask for his hat, that another utters nothing but a string of "Yes's," and so on. If the actor has it in him to win the audience's favor, that ability should not be obstructed by the dramatist, provided that the necessary freedom does not destroy the unity of the greater design. An actor without something "to get his teeth in" is foredoomed to personal failure despite his best efforts. In the nature of the case it is the dramatist's obligation to derive every possible ounce of consistent interest value from each part. Is there opportunity to use the interesting character of this episode elsewhere in the play? Is there any richer development of character to be had by giving this person a scene with any other principal? It's worth considering, anyway.

In this subject of characterization, perhaps more than in any other consideration of detail, it is evident that we are merely reapplying the broad principles of dramatic effect. One that remains to be applied is that aforementioned value of prolonging the pleasure experienced in the theater.

We find, therefore, that the element of retardation is applied to character. To sustain the delight of seeing characters work out their destinies along their individual lines, we

do not generally go straight to the point in a scene between characters, but we delay so long as tantalizing the audience is pleasurable to its members. The adjustment of states of mind between two characters frequently constitutes at once the drama, the retardation, and the progress of the action—and the audience enjoys it. The quibbler, who delights in evading the point by misinterpreting the statements made to him, is an eternal character in the theater mainly because retardation is a valid principle. But here, again, no general guidance may be given. Just how much to retard the change that constantly takes place in developing characterization, depends upon the material, and on the whole is one more matter for the fine discrimination of the dramatist, himself.

EMOTION

IT HAS been said or implied, over and over again, that the theater is essentially an emotional instrument. In characters we employ the most powerful parts of that instrument to evoke emotion. Boucicault makes the profound observation in his "The Art of Dramatic Composition," that: "Interest is concerned about events, sympathy with persons. We feel sympathy with a person, but we feel interest in the career of such a person." Using characters we may inflame mob passions till the spectators rise as a body, tear up the seats, wreck the theater, and go forth to spread a spirit of revolution. Only it is not necessary for character constantly to tear passion to tatters.¹

We do not always want the spectator to be stirred to the depths, for if we touch the limit we can go no further. We want milder forms of emotional appeal too, just as a musician finds his instrument most effective when he produces from it soft notes as well as loud ones. "What melody can be made," asks John Dryden in his preface to "Troilus and Cressida," "on that instrument all whose strings are screwed up at first to their utmost stretch and to the same sound?

¹ Stephen F. Austin's earlier-mentioned "Principles of Drama-Therapy" (New York, 1917) is an interesting attempt to determine how far the psychological power of the theater may be shaped to its most beneficent effect, called by the author, "soul-healing."

But this is not the worst: for the characters likewise bear a part in the general calamity if you consider the passions as embodied in them; for it follows of necessity that no man can be distinguished from another by his discourse when every man is ranting, swaggering, and exclaiming with the same excess. . . . By this means the characters are only distinct in name; but, in reality, all the men and women in the play are the same person. No man should pretend to write who cannot temper his fancy with his judgment: nothing is more dangerous to a raw horseman than a hot-mouthed jade without a curb. It is necessary, therefore, for a poet who would concern an audience by describing of a passion, first to prepare it and not to rush upon it all at once."

The frequency with which dramatists merely aim to thrill by wracking the emotions of their audiences through their characters, has made many an earnest observer repudiate the theater in disgust. The time to be indignant with the theater is when it misuses the power of emotion, for the mere fact that it is able so easily to sway emotion involves the obligation to respect it. There is, moreover, the practical necessity of preventing an audience from feeling ashamed of its weaknesses when it goes away, for this state of mind is injurious to future business at the box-office.

The spectator should not be betrayed—if not for the sake of the moral responsibility, then for financial reasons as aforesaid. He should never be permitted to distrust what he believes to be his best emotions, or he will not be disposed to yield to them again. In the theater, participation in the feelings of a character tends to kill the spectator's judgment because it involves prejudice. Any community of strong feeling readily tends to excesses that individuals in sober mind would never commit. But when the play is over, or its violence has subsided, the spectator's judgment comes back again. So, while a dramatist frequently enlists the spectator's prejudices either for or against a character, he should be careful, having derived all the theatrical value required, to restore the proper perspective at the earliest possible moment.

In other words, the dramatist must constantly tear himself away from the consideration of details in his play, to view

them all with reference to their proper places in the greater scheme. He must consider the impression created by character as just one element in a cumulative effect which in itself is constructive if the characters are not.

Thomas Jefferson, the great statesman, distrusted the heat of argument because he said that men never were convinced by argument but by reflection. This is an excellent thing to remember in the theater if we seek permanence in the full impression—even that permanence that leads the spectator, after reflection, to conclude that he has seen a good show and to recommend it to his friends.

Once upon a time somebody said that "audiences never should be made to think." It sounded well and was duly broadcast by those who thought *they* didn't like to think.² What should have been said, however, is that audiences do not like to be conscious of the effort of thinking. They do not like preachments, which is human enough. But they actually *do* like to think. There are violent scenes in the theater the contemplation of which excites passions rather than thought. On the other hand there are different kinds of emotion that are succeeded by thought as logically as One is succeeded by Two.

And once again we have a truth that was discovered in its application to the theater years and years ago. Beaumarchias, in his "Essay on the Serious Drama," 1767,³ wrote the following: "If loud laughter is the enemy of reflection, pity, on the other hand, induces silence: it invites us to meditate, and isolates us from distracting externals. He who weeps at a play is alone; and the more deeply he feels, the more genuine is his pleasure, especially in the Serious Drama, which moves us by true and natural means. Often, in the midst of an amusingly pleasant scene, some charming bit of emotion causes abundant and ready tears to fall, which, mingling with a graceful smile, bring sympathy and joy to the face of the spectator. Is not a touching conflict of this sort the greatest triumph of art, as well as the sweetest

² See the passage dealing with this point on page 151 f.

³ Translated into English for the first time by Barrett H. Clark in his "European Theories of the Drama."

sensation that can be experienced by a person of sensibility? Sympathy has this advantage over the spirit of ridicule, that it is never aroused in us without the concomitant quality of realization, which is made all the more powerful as it appeals to us directly, on the stage."

THE TRUTH OF CHARACTER

IF THE reader suspects that I am working around to his acceptance of the fact that the worth-while characters in plays are the morally good ones, he is entirely right. The others have their places and unquestionably should appear in all authentic representations of life; but as the progress of life itself is constructive, the progress of the representation should be equally so. That, in all events, is my private belief, which I say because at this juncture I must defer completely to the dramatist's philosophy of life. No book on mere technique may reasonably be expected to supply that.

Actors are not always agreed on which is the real star of "Othello," the name part or Iago; there is some similar question about Macbeth and Lady Macbeth—but the public unerringly chooses the nobler figure in either case. What constitutes nobleness of character is another matter for one's own philosophy to determine. There are crook heroes in plays, like Raffles and Robin Hood, but their popularity is usually accounted for on the ground that their robberies are, superficially at least, generous acts. The persons robbed in most instances have themselves acquired the stolen property dishonestly. Robin Hood, you remember, merely borrowed from the tyrannical rich to benefit the oppressed poor. Avery Hopwood, author of "Fair and Warmer" and co-author with Mary Roberts Rinehart of "Seven Days," has remarked in this connection that, "bad women may be made attractive by giving them beautiful souls. They will be made sympathetic," he said in his contribution to that series of playwriting interviews in *The New York Press* in 1914. "Think of Camille and all the *femmes mécomprises* that have been modeled after her, both in literature and in real life. It staggers the imagination."

Colonel Philippe Brideau in "The Honor of the Family," and Hajj, the beggar, in "Kismet," are rascals—not unmitigated rascals, perhaps, Hajj, for instance, having a pure, fierce love of his daughter. The Baron Chevrial, in Cazauran's "A Parisian Romance," is no less a rascal. Each is the most interesting figure in the play in which he appears because there is none in the entire *dramatis personæ* who is cleverer. He is admirable for being a really superior person despite the fact that rascality is his bent; but because he commits villainous deeds, the audience properly demands that at the end he shall go down in defeat. In the main he has the great qualification for interesting dramatic character—individual volition powerfully expressed in a direction not easy to anticipate—but suffering the heavy handicap of destructive purpose.

The utter villain is a fascinating figure; but if you make a composite picture of him out of all the fascinating villains in literature, and then compare that with a similar portrait of all the heroes, there is no doubt that the villain will suffer by contrast. The redeemed villain is another matter, and by the very fact of his redemption assumes the heroic mold. Profiting by this truth Marie Corelli made a daringly great characterization out of Lucifer, himself, in her famous book, "The Sorrows of Satan."

Said Aristotle about character in his "Poetics" (XV): "First and most important it must be good. Now any speech or action that manifests moral purpose of any kind must be expressive of character: the character will be good if the purpose is good." Dryden, in his preface to "Troilus and Cressida," expressed the same great truth in another way: "The chief character or hero in a tragedy, as I have already shown, ought in prudence to be such a man who has so much more of virtue in him than of vice, that he may be left amiable to the audience, which otherwise cannot have any concernment for his sufferings." And Dryden wrote in a profligate age.

Audiences like to see sweeping changes of character in the course of the play, but I suspect mainly changes from pitiful to admirable. Progress of this kind contains an

element of real victory for the sympathetic side of the issue. At the beginning the sympathetic side suffers oppression. Its cause is in the right and therefore it commands sympathy. The precipitating act is the turning of the tide toward possible justice. And the establishment of justice is satisfying because it is eminently right.



PART TEN

DIALOGUE

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BLESSING OF WORDS

AT THE beginning of the veteran actor's big scene in the play he sits writing at a table. The young man, who portrays his prodigal son returned for forgiveness, could enter through the open door but hesitates upon the threshold. The father presently looks up and sees him there. He beckons the youth sternly—and then says, "Come in."

Not, "Come in" and then beckons; but the other way around. The gesture precedes the speech. Various reasons are assigned for this arrangement; but the great players are virtually all agreed on its effectiveness. So far as we are at present concerned, it is effective because it gives the audience opportunity to apprehend the actor's intent, to divine for itself before the speech interprets or confirms. It takes advantage of the fact that the spectator's eye is quicker than his ear.¹

¹ Oliver Goldsmith, admiring the superb acting of Mlle. Clairon, the celebrated French tragédienne, observed that: "On her first speech her hands and tongue never set out together, but the one prepares us for the other. She sometimes begins with a mute, eloquent attitude; but never goes forward all at once, with hands, eyes, head and voice. By this simple beginning is given a power of rising in the passion of the scene."—Quoted with approbation by Fitzgerald in his "The Art of Acting," London, 1892. See also Chapter III, "The Stage Way," in the present work. What Mlle. Clairon was really doing, whether she was conscious of the underlying principles or not, was to present just one form of appeal at a time and all the appeals arranged in the most effective order. Singers of popular songs frequently touch upon this device when they make their words linger after the accompanying music. The psychology of this is sound; but whether it is good singing or not is for more competent critics to judge.

Most unthinking persons believe that dialogue is the first essential in a stage play, particularly in these days when "the speaking stage" is the convenient term with which to distinguish stage from screen; but reflection soon shows that stage plays without words are entirely possible, and may be, as in the case of the perennial "L'Enfant Prodigue," tremendously popular for generations. But although in the theater the ear is second to the eye, appeals to it are important enough.

Just how much of the burden of the story should be borne by the dialogue depends upon the material. An intensive character study is likely to require far more words than the action story of a melodrama. To make the speeches do everything is the common fault of amateur dramatists; on the other hand it has been a notorious failing of George Bernard Shaw in his later plays. That Shaw can make three hours of mere talk interesting is, after all, just a *tour de force*, and in no degree invalidates the fact that his plays would be better plays if they observed the honest requirements of the medium.²

UNFAMILIAR TERMS

STAGE words being primarily to convey facts or ideas not better or more reasonably conveyed in physical action, it follows that they must be fully intelligible. If the mere sound of the word is the aim, as in the cases of some of the names invented by "Lewis Carroll" in his fantastic stories and poems—jabberwock, snark, and the like, or the celebrated "long word," honorificabilitudinitatibus, which was

² Arnold Daly, who did more than any one else to introduce Shaw to America, who first produced "Candida" here in the face of much discouragement, told Shaw this same thing to his teeth. "He might write a great play if he chose to write for the theater and not to air his humanitarian views," Daly said in an interview in *The New York Times*, April 11, 1915, "for few men know play construction as he does. It isn't that he does not know how to build a play that some of his later ones are little more than conversations, as he himself admits; it is because he does not love the theater. I told him he did not one time; he protested that I was wrong, whereupon I proceeded to prove the truth of my assertion. . . . We walked up and down the Embankment near his house a dozen times while we argued back and forth. I told him he did not love the theater, for what one loved one served, and since he was not serving the theater in writing his later plays he could not love it."

famous before Shakespeare used it in "Love's Labour's Lost" (Act V, Sc. I)—it does not matter if the audience has never heard it before. But if the word is a symbol for something else, as most words are, then it should be one that is readily to be understood.

The use of extravagant, unfamiliar words and phrases is a failing of many playwrights. They should remember that the average playgoer is not equipped with a dictionary to look up picturesque but to him temporarily meaningless expressions at the time they are spoken—incidentally missing important points in the play. Of course, sometimes the fact that a character uses big words is all need be understood, and what he says is really of no consequence whatever; but it is decidedly baffling and irritating to feel that the "high-falutin" word *may* have meant something.

Sometimes such words are unavoidable. An ordinary, commercial combination of words, like "stock in escrow," may be perfectly in harmony with subject and occasion, and at the same time a mystery to the *matinée* girl. It is therefore wise to provide a definition of the term "escrow" somewhere in the play that it may be understood at once when put to direct use. When "Within the Law" was first produced in London the audience was furnished with full program notes explaining the meaning of numerous strange expressions of the American crooks depicted in the action.

In pointing out in an article one time that things dramatic may be too precise, Frederic Thompson illustrated his point with a scene from "Via Wireless," wherein a great mass of steel was seen coming from a furnace in white-hot condition. Critics and auditors in general promptly objected that it should have appeared red. Thompson, knowing he was right, wrote letters to the newspapers arguing the propriety of the effect. But it was no use, so, in deference to his uneducated public, he gave up and made it red.

Now Thompson seems to have been in error, for his efforts to establish the truth were all outside his play. He did not employ the consistent method of presenting his argument directly in the play with the effect in question. The common fallacy might have been brought up between characters

in the piece and corrected then and there. That is how Augustus Thomas familiarized his audience with the psychology of color in "The Harvest Moon." That is how unfamiliar terms are made intelligible in dialogue.

GENERALIZATIONS

THIS matter of intelligibility deserves more than passing notice. Unintelligibility in plays is a serious and common defect. Nevertheless, some writers deliberately affect it. Mistaking the purpose and the achievement of Maeterlinck in striving with all his noble genius to express uplifting thoughts of spirit that lie beyond words, envying the praise of discerning critics that has been his reward, they write upon trite, hackneyed themes in an owlsh manner and with cryptic utterances that for the most part mean absolutely nothing. Their characters move around the stage wagging their heads so knowingly at one another that the good-natured spectator, distrusting his own ability to judge and fearful of betraying an abysmal ignorance, is certain that it *must* mean something, and applauds.

Most of this sort of thing is committed under the guise of "symbolism" and poetry, which, of course, it is not. The true poet, in his own profession, is an eminently practical and common sense person. Take Robert Browning at the height of his fame. One time, immediately after a lecture he had given on poetry, an admirer asked him to explain some especially enigmatical line in one of his early compositions. He tried to oblige, and then confessed that he had forgotten just what he did mean. "You'd better," he advised with a smile, "ask the Browning Society." William Wordsworth, in the effort to prove that nonsensical thoughts in prose were no less so in verse, criticized Cowper roundly for speaking of a "churchgoing bell" and "smiling valleys and rocks."³ Shakespeare had many a fling at verbal affectation and bombast. And one might go on and on providing evidence that the real poets of all time studiously avoided and earnestly deplored these very sins of which

³ See the famous "Preface" to the 1800 edition of his collected poems.

insincere scribblers are frequently guilty. Sheridan did not fail to ridicule it in "The Critic." In that delightful absurdity, Sir Walter Raleigh is made to say, for instance,

Thy staunch Sagacity still tracks the future
In the fresh Print of the o'ertaken Past.

And a few minutes later the immortal Puff remarks to his friends who attend the rehearsal with him, "I was obliged to be plain and intelligible in the first Scene, because there was so much matter of Fact in it; but now faith! you have trope, Figure and Metaphor, as Plenty as noun substantives." ⁴

Being obscure in a sincere and generally intelligent piece of writing is something vastly different. This is due in the main to that very human fault betrayed when an author connects his thoughts in his mind and not on his paper. Because it is so human and so likely to happen, the author should try constantly to look upon his work with the eyes of his audience—the most difficult achievement, I repeat, of all. There may thus be in earnestly written dramas distinct gaps between long, clear passages; or it may be that too much well-meant generalization has thrown a kind of fog over everything.

Generalizing is always dangerous in playwriting, particularly when upon the generalization depends the clearness of the plot. A generalization is most effective when it comes at the end of a chain of events—for instance the indictment of all men by Timon of Athens as a conclusion reached by that Shakespearean hero after a very specific experience with his "friends." But then, every one knows that the logical place for a moral is at the end of the tale.

The great dramatist Pierre Corneille had views on this subject as long ago as 1660 when he wrote his "First Discourse on the Uses and Elements of Dramatic Poetry." He there advised reducing platitudes in stage conversation from the general to the specific, declaring that, "I vastly prefer having my character say, 'Love gives you great cause for

⁴ Act II, Sc. 2.

uneasiness,' than 'Love gives those who are in its power great cause for uneasiness.'"⁵ He hastened to add to this, however, that he didn't want to do away with moral and political maxims altogether. He just felt that too much of it tires the listener by slackening the action. And he was indubitably right.

INTENTION

THE important thing for the dramatist to do when in danger of being misunderstood, is to make sure of just what he is trying to say. He may surprise himself by discovering that he himself doesn't know. It is not easy. There are so many little shades of meaning that to determine just the right one calls for great care.

Let it be supposed that the dramatist has a little situation in which Billy has just told Betty that he loves her, but is anxious to find out if Betty knows that he really is engaged to marry Fanny. There are several ways of expressing this idea, each reasonable and generally satisfactory: "Did you tell Fanny?" "Didn't you tell Fanny?" and "You didn't tell Fanny!"

All bring out the fact and yet there are marked differences between them. *Did you tell Fanny?* is the direct form. It is suggestive along a number of lines. Answer me, yes or no. Whether I like it or not remains to be seen. The second, *Didn't you tell Fanny?* implies other things. Why, I thought you had informed her. Did you neglect or forget to communicate with her, or did you deliberately avoid telling her? I have done a dozen and one things in the belief that you had told her. The third, *You didn't tell Fanny!* conveys still more. You didn't tell Fanny, did you? I thought you knew better. I didn't think you would. I didn't want you to. I'm afraid you did; and if so, it's going to embarrass me dreadfully. And so on. Incidentally, if the response to this question or statement of telling Fanny, however that is made, is, "We will not discuss her," it implies that we will not discuss her *now*. To say, "We

⁵ Translation of Beatrice Stewart MacClintock in Clark's "European Theories of the Drama," p. 140.

will keep her out of the discussion," is a little more final.

The playwright must strike the nail on the head. That a thing is "not large" means that it is small; and the author should say so. To "change *the* will," means any will; "*his* (or *her*) will" signifies the one in question. Brown remarks to a friend, "Here comes Mrs. Brown," when he really means, "Here comes my wife," and not that the approaching Unknown is possibly his mother or sister-in-law. "Why should I be protected?" is a deal more to the point than the passively indignant, "Protect me?" "Have you met him?" implies, "Do you know him?"—although, of course, there are many times when the former is more to the point. Really, when one comes down to it, conditions might be created wherein many of these citations may be placed beyond objection; but, in the circumstances from which they were taken and in which they are presented here, they are undoubtedly at fault.

Precision in the choice of words does not necessarily mean that an author must employ the grammatically accurate or yet the philosophically correct; it is rather that he must use words that best befit the purpose in mind—that he must act to give intelligible expression to ideas right and wrong.

Sis Hopkins's "I hain't done nothin' to nobuddy whut hain't done nothin' to me," fits her simple nature like a glove. "Elevator" and "lift" (meaning the useful device that contradicts its English and American names by going down), "ices" and "ice cream," "floats" and "footlights," are not to be howled down upon mere etymological testimony; the preference should be given those that best express the underlying ideas for, strictly speaking, the dramatist writes in meanings, not in words. The test is always the *purpose*. In the army they quite properly ignore rule-of-thumb propriety and pronounce "oblique" "oblike," because the long "i" carries better on the field. In the same way, I noticed while traveling in Germany that there they use "zwei" and "zwoh" interchangeably for "two," because of the possible confusion of "zwei" and "drei" (three). The liberal use of vowels in song lyrics, particularly for sustained or final notes, so that singers may warble with open

mouths, will be recalled in the same connection. It is why Italian is especially favored as a song-language.

The immediately foregoing are intelligent compromises. But there are plenty of lapses of speech in plays that cannot be excused on the ground that the characters uttering them know no better. They may be referred only to the ignorance of the dramatist. They may even be individually mere trifles, and yet, by accumulation, may lend a cheap air to the whole play. Most of us persist in little sins of this kind. Almost any newspaper or popular magazine reveals the misuse of the word "infer" for the word "imply," or "replica" for "model." A person really infers something that another seems to imply, and is not inferring an idea when he is suggesting it to another. A replica is a reproduction made by the same artist who made the original; wherefore it seems strange to hear that the Toonerville Women's Club has just acquired a modern "replica" of the Venus de Milo that was made originally so many centuries ago. And so on.

Inaccuracy is not excusable on the ground that the dramatist writes plays and not history, and that he leaves sermons to ministers. He cannot consistently deprecate his obligation to his art if not to his audience. Anachronisms, other improbabilities, and things manifestly absurd, certainly do not mark the proper way to do anything. Shakespeare's achievements would have been a trifle nearer perfection had he not provided the ancient Romans with striking clocks; and one picture by a famous artist would have been closer to great accomplishment had he omitted pipes from the mouths of soldiers in the time of Christ. In these cases, however, the distinguished men had no good means of checking these particular facts. The dramatist of to-day, on the other hand—even the humblest one—has almost limitless sources of authentic information.

DANGEROUS EXPRESSION

THERE is a distinction between not knowing what one is talking about, and in knowing it, but saying it poorly. To illus-

trate, the woman, who tells a friend about her beloved ancestor who "fought in a hundred battles and lost either an arm or leg in every engagement," does not employ a sound idea. Still less does clear thought distinguish the foreman over five men employed in digging a hole, who wanted half of them to come up. On the contrary, the Irish housemaid, who tells of "the tirrible corns on me Kismet,"—having been given to understand that Kismet is an Arabian word meaning fate—knows what she is talking about, but doesn't express it well. That is the difference.

No dramatist will be long before his audiences without learning to be careful in his lines. Theatergoers have been so trained in the economies of playwriting art that they attach special significance to every word, so it is not remarkable that, when there is a choice of easy interpretations, they will pounce upon that which conveys most.

The desperate lover, who declares to his heartless "soul's desire" that he will commit suicide, and draws vivid word pictures of himself as he will appear when "washed up," will do less to convey the impression that he has a dirty face if he will add, "by the tide." In the latter part of August, 1906, when occurred the opening night of Henry Arthur Jones's play "The Hypocrites," Lennard, on the eve of his wedding to a pure and wealthy young woman, was startled by the appearance of the girl he has led astray. It was a tense moment. She started to speak. But he remembered that the door was open, and exclaimed, "Shush!" The novel form of the word caused a titter in the audience. The same thing occurred when the act was played by students of a well-known dramatic school. It did not ruin the scene, but it came perilously near it. For more than a season afterward, vaudeville performers used the word as a device to get a laugh. And the word still stands in the printed play.

There, again, is the wife who has proposed becoming a man's mistress in order to settle her husband's debt (of honor). The wife speaks: "Ours is the expedient of two desperate persons driven into accepting unnatural means to accomplish a proper end." The husband gesticulates a feeble protest, and then resigns himself. "I see you're bound to

try it," he says. "I see there's no use arguing with you after you've made up your mind; but I'll not sleep until I see you back again."

One might add to these examples certain notorious lines, innocent in conception but even more shocking to the ear. That is not necessary, however, because even the kind that may become the subject of the parlor anecdote courts theatrical disaster. "My soul flows irresistibly toward you," declared a lover in a manuscript play submitted to me several years ago, "toward you who are the only hope of assistance in my settlement-house undertaking." This sudden reduction of irresponsible sentiment to a utilitarian basis became doubly funny when it was remembered that the earlier occupation of the character speaking was high-class embalming.

Then come lines that one may call "mouthfuls." They are awkward to say, and, once uttered, are comical in a droll manner. "Are you ready, Betty?" when asked quickly, impels one to respond, "No, not yetty." A stage director changed a line of "The Goose Girl" to avoid this sort of thing. The line was, "Your men are here, Herr." It was changed to, "Herr, your men are here."

PROPRIETY

THAT there should be no offense against morals and general propriety seems to be a matter of opinion, although I cannot see why it should be. Many dramatists, who wrote plays in that period of American excess from about 1912 to 1926, excused the most unmitigated filth on the ground that it was true to life. I neither recognize that justification, nor share in the view that it ought to be excused at all. For the present I content myself with saying that a dramatist should keep his dialogue within the bounds of propriety maintained by the audience that he addresses, which is a fair compromise with the radicals.

That propriety is something that varies the world over. In one country it may be all right for a character to take money from her stocking; in another, the author may be compelled, in deference to sensibility there, to have her take

it from her bosom. Practices as much opposed, in the moral sense, may be found still closer together; they may occur in the same city simultaneously before two different grades of audience. Suppose that one were writing a play to be presented before rough crowds in second-rate theaters, or in burlesque, perhaps; he could afford to be easy-going in certain matters of class propriety. Offered before church congregations, there would be much matter, readily acceptable in the other places, to be softened or eliminated. But that is an extravagant illustration. The same disparity may exist between a "crook" melodrama and a morality play presented in the same house. A religious drama, presented anywhere, must make concessions to its own elevated character.

HACKNEYED LINES

THERE will be less disagreement with me when I say that dialogue should not bore the audience with stale lines and trivial chatter.

However, as the loquacious maid with the feather duster (who used to open so many of the mid-Victorian comedies), may be made legitimate upon occasion, so may, "Curses!" "Unhand me, villain!" and so on—exceptions being made of trivialities like "Yes," "Yes?" "Yes!" that are bright only in a feeble way and have virtually no excuse for recurrence—provided that the line or lines used really express something worth while.

If sound thought underlies, and no immediate use may be made of a speech, on account of mere repetition or familiar use in another sense than that intended, it is safe to predict that it may return to active service when its monotony has worn off.

There are any number of "acts" in vaudeville at the present time that open with a young man meeting a girl and saying, "I *beg* your pardon, but haven't I met you before?" It is not seriously objectionable; but it has been done so many times that as soon as it is uttered, the team is confronted with the problem of overcoming general impatience of the audience. It should be relegated to rest with the tea-table dia-

logue of the so-called society, or "cup-and-saucer" comedies. "Another cup of tea?" "Please." "How many lumps?" "One, please." "Lemon?" "Thank you." And so forth. If but one character, in such circumstances, would specify weak tea, take one and one-half lumps and relish vinegar in the mixture by way of change, the Tired Business Man might well fall upon his neck and weep for joy.

Real? Of course such talk is real. But we want not stupid fact in the theater, we prefer just *appearance* of reality with the dullness removed. Irvin V. Willat, the motion picture director, once told me that, in the scenario department of the old Thomas H. Ince Studios in Los Angeles, the staff sometimes spent whole days contriving new ways to say "Next morning" and "That night."



CHAPTER XXXII

THE MECHANICS OF DIALOGUE

WORDS that do not undertake to carry too much of the play, words that are intelligible, words that are precise from the standpoint of the dramatist's intent, words that observe the limitations of good taste, words that are refreshing to hear—these are desirable in the light of ordinary common sense, and need no technical playwriting knowledge to be appreciated. On the other hand, dovetailing words into the play scheme has some art to it—rather more, in fact, than even many successful dramatists imagine.

We use words so commonly and easily in our everyday lives, that in working up stage conversations we are carelessly disposed to go just by the feel of the thing, to write down expressions that we know people in such-and-such circumstances normally would employ. There is much to justify this attitude; but there is to be preferred a more careful method from which dialogue emerges with greater power. In writing dialogue as in any other kind of composition, the dramatist is able to cultivate for himself a habit of mind that in time will make his approach just as free and his pen just as facile as in careless work.

THE STOCK OF CONVERSATION

WHEN the plot is well built there is never any lack of subject matter for the characters to talk about; so that difficulty—as common a symptom as it is in most amateur playwriting—need not be dwelt upon. From the structural standpoint, more important than what the characters are to talk about is what they are to talk *toward*. The conversation must do its

full share in unfolding certain story facts. These are the objectives, although the dramatist is generally the only one who knows at the outset what those objectives are. The characters, especially if they are in opposition, will not anticipate the structural aim, and quite certainly the audience will be in the dark about it—in doubt about it, anyway.

Knowing the purpose of a particular bit of dialogue, the dramatist is much in the position of a newspaper interviewer who tries to shape a conversation with more or less obstreperous persons so that they will discuss the desired points. Dramatic characters resemble these persons in real life and must be studied and coaxed in the same manner. Being individuals with their own likes and dislikes, they will not permit themselves to be hauled about and browbeaten by the dramatist without losing their identities. And that is one reason why the adroitness of the playwright in good dialogue is so admirable.

Earlier pages have shown how characters are made to belong to the plot, with their lives and fortunes indissolubly united with the chain of events therein. It is therefore not asking an impossible thing to demand that characters shall stick to the subject. If they refuse to stick to the subject, that is proof positive that they do not belong to the play, for if they did, they would not themselves *want* to talk about anything but pertinent matters, making another rule that works both ways.

Nevertheless, many dramatists in love with their characters are afraid of their plots. That is, they think of plot and character as totally distinct elements. The characters will chatter with sparkling vivacity about many things. The conversation begins to lag, and the author reaches out hurriedly for a fragment of the plot, which, awkwardly imparted then all in a bunch to the audience, leaves the way clear for resumption of the entertaining *tête-à-tête*. The plot, in such cases, is something to be dragged in, a necessary evil. This habit of mind is to be seen most forlornly demonstrated in the average musical comedy where the plot cuts in on the entertainment as inconspicuously as possible between the comics, the dances, and the songs. I recall, as typical of

this, how the Broadway critics, almost to a man, deplored the necessary shreds of plot in "She's My Baby," that interrupted the vastly more entertaining antics of Beatrice Lillie in the star part. No plot can be effective when it is hurled in chunks at the spectator's head, a point that requires no multiplication of instances to establish its good sense. Plots develop. They are unfolded. They have steady forward movement.

THE WELL-ORDERED SCENE

IN THIS view the first obvious duty is to arrange the facts of the conversation that they may be in the most effective order, the controlling object of the scene being last because when that is reached the scene is ended.¹ This method is closely allied with the way of arranging plot facts described in an earlier chapter. In the case of plot, chronological order was a guide of some value. So it is in the instance of dialogue. It is easy to determine that many a given conversational fact must occur before some other fact and after still another. But there are whole shoals of minor facts the order of which cannot be so conveniently set. In such cases, everything depends upon the material in hand and what the dramatist is trying to make of it. However, an illustration of major arrangement may prove helpful before going into details.

In the fourth acting scene in Act III of "Cyrano de Ber-

¹ As a small point of information it should be explained that a play scene (not in the sense of "scenery") is generally defined as any part of the action which lies between entrances and exits of important characters. As the entrance or exit of an important character almost invariably changes the complexion of events, it follows that the scene defined in this way shall often consist of a full plot step, having a kind of completeness—as in the celebrated "screen scene" from "The School for Scandal"—that makes it interesting in itself when lifted out of the body of the play. In the old dramas, especially those written by the French, the scenes were numbered and ticketed with the names of the characters appearing in them. Technically they were known as plot or necessary scenes and connective scenes. There are usually about forty to a play. While the practice of numbering them has fairly well been abandoned, the delimitation of scenes has a certain value, as W. T. Price frequently pointed out, in giving the dramatist a perspective on a detail of his work while that small part engages his attention. I recommend to your notice as interesting examples, the division into scenes of this kind in the first act of Rostand's "Cyrano de Bergerac" where the stage is almost continuously crowded with people. This numbering is retained in the Helen Dole translation.

gerac," Rostand was faced with the problem of having the handsome Christian rebel against the wise counsel of the grotesque Cyrano who has taught him how to win with clever words and nimble wit the lovely Roxane. Rostand might conceivably have written it this way:

CHRISTIAN. No! I will wait for Roxane here.

CYRANO. Indeed!

CHRISTIAN. No, I tell you! I'm tired of borrowing my letters and my conversation, of playing this rôle and trembling all the while! It was good at first! But I feel that she loves me! Thank you. I am no longer afraid. I am going to speak myself.

CYRANO. (*Bowing to him*). Speak by yourself, sir.

CHRISTIAN. Cyrano, no, do not leave me!

CYRANO. I know all about it! Prepare your memory. Here is an opportunity to cover yourself with glory. Let us lose no time. Don't look so unhappy. Quick, let us return to your house, for I'm going to teach you—

CHRISTIAN. Who told you that I should not know how? At last I am not so stupid! You shall see! But, my dear, your lessons have been profitable. I shall know how to speak alone. And, by all the devils I shall know very well how to take her in my arms!

CYRANO. What has turned your head? Come, learn quickly—

CHRISTIAN. No!

CYRANO. What?

CHRISTIAN (*Seeing Roxane as she comes out of Clomire's house*). 'Tis she! (*Cyrano disappears behind the garden wall*.)

Only Rostand was too much of a dramatist to write it so. The object of the scene was to oblige Christian to speak for himself. Not merely that he should undertake to do it, but that he should be compelled. To get all possible effectiveness out of the matter, Rostand contrived that Christian, finally abandoned by Cyrano, should be stricken with fear that he cannot go on alone after all—that precious device of character change that has been extolled more than once. To prove that Christian, in the folly of his borrowed strength, decides to do this thing of his own free will, Rostand is careful to have Cyrano always willing to stand by him. To force

Christian to carry on when Cyrano finally does consent to go, Rostand has Roxane suddenly appear.

These major facts of the scene fall easily into a logical, chronological order. Christian, at the close of the scene, must face Roxane alone. This means that his decision to do so must come earlier. To prove his decision he must put Cyrano aside, so Cyrano's withdrawal of support must come speedily thereafter. Cyrano's readiness to help obviously should appear after Christian's decision and before his own withdrawal. Faltering in that decision comes most effectively after Christian has cut loose from Cyrano and after the appearance of Roxane has made retreat too late. Otherwise the object of the scene could not be reached. Each fact is completely developed at one time while attention is concentrated upon it so that there is no returning to unfinished matter. In this fashion an experienced dramatist builds his scene, whether he does it on paper or in his head. And in some such way it came about that Rostand really wrote his scene like this:

CYRANO. I know all about it! Prepare your memory. Here is an opportunity to cover yourself with glory. Let us lose no time. Don't look so unhappy. Quick, let us return to your house, for I'm going to teach you—

CHRISTIAN. No!

CYRANO. What?

CHRISTIAN. No! I will wait for Roxane here.

CYRANO. What has turned your head? Come, learn quickly—

CHRISTIAN. No, I tell you! I'm tired of borrowing my letters and my conversation, of playing this rôle and trembling the while! It was good at first! But I feel that she loves me! Thank you. I am no longer afraid. I am going to speak myself.

CYRANO. Indeed!

CHRISTIAN. Who told you that I should not know how? At last I am not so stupid! You shall see! But, my dear, your lessons have been profitable. I shall know how to speak alone. And, by all the devils, I shall know very well how to take her in my arms! (*Seeing Roxane as she comes out of Clomire's house*) 'Tis she! Cyrano, no, do not leave me!

CYRANO (*Bowing to him*). Speak by yourself, sir. (*He disappears behind the garden wall.*)²

I have spoken of but a few of the many excellences of this masterly written bit; but we are talking now of simple structure. It is worth noticing, however, that over the bare bones of structure Rostand has placed the flesh and blood of living emotions. Cyrano takes time to make up his mind to leave Christian to his folly. Christian characteristically is slow to realize that folly. Christian does most of the talking as a man really uncertain of his judgment, trying principally to convince himself, and Cyrano talks little as a man engaged in perception. The scene is not narrowed to essentials of plot as a novice who is enthusiastic about mere structure might make it, but is developed and broadened as living, vital drama in which the spectator's pleasure is deliberately prolonged. And intelligent retardation is as important in dialogue as in any other place.

It is evident that in this matter of dialogue the same, now familiar fundamentals of playwriting apply. Facts are arranged in order of effectiveness. Just one is defined at a time—and completely defined as far as the dramatist desires to have it known in its general given position. The dramatist is presenting what, in its best form, is a complete statement of a specific subject, the materials so ordered that for the spectator there is a steady, uninterrupted accretion of knowledge about it, expressed in terms sufficiently attractive to keep up his continuous interest. The consideration is based here, as in all other phases of playwriting, not upon artificial standards of taste, but upon human psychology which is the one dependable guide, test, and end to effectiveness in the fine arts.

SYNTAX

IN DISCUSSION of play structure in general, it has been pointed out that chronological order of facts is by no means the only useful order.³ The common inversions of dialogue

² Translation of Helen Dole, New York, 1899.

³ See especially pp. 66 and 230.

afford numerous illustrations of this. At random I am taking this bit from Clyde Fitch's play "Beau Brummel":

MORTIMER (*the Valet*). Mr. Brummel, sir, here's the memorandum of an I.O.U. for one thousand pounds given by you to Lord Gainsby at White's three nights ago for sums lost at hazard.

BEAU (*A little disturbed*). The deuce, Mortimer! It must be paid to-day. That's a debt of honor. How can we obtain the money?

MORTIMER. I can try Abrahams again, sir; but he was very difficult the last time.

The general order of the speeches is chronological—that is, that Beau, reminded of his indebtedness, feels that as it is a point of honor he must pay up, and that it is only barely possible that he can raise the necessary amount from Abrahams—but, within the individual speeches, the order of facts is almost directly reversed from what, according to the evidence, it actually must have been. In order to show how much less effective a chronological order there would make the quoted bit, the matter may be rearranged as follows:

MORTIMER. Mr. Brummel, sir. Three nights ago you were at White's. While playing at hazard there you lost a great deal of money. Lord Gainsby loaned you a thousand pounds and you gave him an I.O.U. for it. I have the memorandum here.

BEAU. That's a debt of honor. It must be paid to-day. The deuce, Mortimer! How can we obtain the money?

MORTIMER. Abrahams was very difficult the last time; but I can try him again, sir.

The let-down in force is especially noticeable in the first speech. Whereas the interest of the audience is piqued in the speech as Fitch wrote it, by the opening reference to an I.O.U., there is nothing to stir it particularly here in the rearranged opening statement that, "Three nights ago you were at White's"—or, indeed, in anything else that is given until the existence of the I.O.U. is made known and Beau's predicament becomes positive. There is, however, no set rule

about this. The illustration is given to show that there are times in dialogue when chronological order is useful and times when it is not, with the perhaps more important point that the real unit of dialogue is not the word but the whole speech, just as in composition the unit of language is found to be not the word but the sentence.

The spoken stage speech, however, is fundamentally different from the written sentence, chiefly in that it represents the individual thought and feeling of the speaker, which, taken in conjunction with thoughts and feelings expressed by other speakers on the scene, affords the audience material for deductions which in combination are the real story of the play. The play, of course, actually is in the mind of the spectator and not on the actors' side of the footlights. It is natural, therefore, that the tendency of virtually all successful dramatists down the ages is to see that a single speech confines itself to but a single general deduction for the audience. It may be composed of many sentences; but in the end these are fused into just one controlling thought. This is true even of that preternaturally long speech in Augustus Thomas's play, "The Copperhead," in which the now aged hero explains away the heavy stigma that has attached itself to him these many years during which his neighbors and friends believed him to be a traitor to his country. It is equally true of the long court-room speeches in Act II of Galsworthy's "Justice." In all events, without splitting hairs over its fine distinctions, to regard the individual speech as the unit of dialogue is convenient for the playwright in the present view.

TRANSITION

WHETHER the arrangement of facts is chronological or not, they ought generally to be linked together for a smooth association of ideas that will carry audience attention along easily and naturally. Thus, in the illustration lately quoted, the "memorandum of an I.O.U." readily evolves "one thousand pounds" as that straightway calls for "given by you to Lord Gainsby at White's three nights ago for sums lost at hazard." This "continuity of thought," the importance of

which has been stressed in earlier pages, is easier for the actors, too. They are able to memorize their parts with less effort because one idea prompts another, and to give better performances because they are not then obliged to cover with their own ingenuity of business, gaps in the flow of interest. This was keenly realized by James Quin, that bluff, picturesque old actor who flourished in the time of Garrick and earlier, and about whose memory there has clustered a wealth of anecdote. When Samuel Foote, the contemporaneous mimic and dramatist, boasted of his better ability to memorize, Quin worsted him by offering him this:

So she went into the garden to pick a cabbage-leaf to make an apple pie of; and a she-bear, coming up the street, put her head into the shop and said, "Do you sell any soap?" So she died, and he very imprudently married the barber; and the powder fell out of the counselor's wig, and poor Mrs. Mackay's puddings were quite entirely spoilt; and there were present the Garnelites, and the Goblilies, and the Picinnies and the Great Pangendrum himself, with the little round button at top; and they played at the ancient game of "Catch who catch can" till the gunpowder ran out of the heels of their boots.⁴

Which, as a burlesque example of disunity, is probably matched only by the song of the celebrated comedian, George Ober that, as I recall, he used to sing immediately after his first entrance:

She was the only girl I ever loved—
Had a face like a horse and buggy.
I met her while leaning on the lake.
O, fireman save my child!

There should be gradation within the speech from the first word to the last. This prevents the making of such speeches as this that once came to my attention in a manuscript play: "It's a great thing, this Chautauqua, and it serves a great purpose. The children should be here by now. I smell the potatoes burning." Of course, pauses, and intervening busi-

⁴ "Notes and Queries." P. 405. Nov. 16, 1850.

ness do much to bridge gaps like these; but generally there is little excuse for the gaps existing at all. And yet even here it must be realized that dialogue is an expression of states of mind which in themselves are frequently erratic in their course of action.

On the other hand, it is possible to provide too many links from one idea to another. The facts given may be every one important and valuable to the scene; only they should not be all crammed into the dialogue. There are other media of expression to be employed also. There is thus, in the following illustration from a novice's play, much to prove that the writer was thinking out the emotional possibilities of his scene, but it is heavily over-burdening a single speech. The old mother speaks:

Such secrets cannot be kept. You cannot always deny your child. Pearl is getting to a thinking age. She will soon be asking questions. I'm growing old, Hester. I love you as a mother. It was my flesh and blood that wronged you. If he had lived, I know he would have done his best to make it right; and I do believe that you would have made an honest man of him. Ah, but it is all of the past; and I don't want to see that which is dead and gone rise up to ruin your future life.

Most of this should have been unspoken but nevertheless present out of material already known or conveyed by means other than speech.

It must not be forgotten that dialogue is only part of the means of reaching the audience, and that much of its pleasure lies in its own deductions. The continuity of thought often exists most effectively in what may be called the overtones of the scene—the unspoken facts, the established circumstances, the implications. The dialogue in such cases, considered apart from those overtones, may seem jumpy and disconnected. This is so frequently true in successful plays that the authors are reluctant to show their manuscripts to persons untrained in dramatic "visualization." When Bronson Howard published his comedy "Kate" (New York, 1906), he clearly was inspired by this fear for he interpolated much descriptive matter to overcome the difficulty, and prepared his text gen-

erally to give it the character of a novel, without, however, altering the dialogue. As a result of this interpretation "Kate" remains unique among printed plays.

Transition from fact to fact within the speech, is not always accomplished, then, with words. The characters may not even mean literally a single word they utter; and the dramatic interest may be wholly in the implications. Undeclared lovers may speak for hours of things that have no bearing whatever on their real meaning that is crystal clear to the rest of the world. Boucicault was fond of this method, and examples of it recur in his pieces. I recall something of one instance in his old melodrama "The Pope of Rome," in which the hero's comical companion, in prison with him and closely guarded, gives the hero minute instructions about how to escape by telling one of the guards an apparently innocent story.

RESPONSIVENESS

MAKING transitions from fact to fact in the single speech is one thing, and making it from speech to speech is another. Of the two problems the second is perhaps the easier to solve, for one character is always ready to answer another's question or to comment upon another's remark. This readily slips the interest of the spectator from one speaker to the next. Especially when two characters are engaged in difference of opinion will interest be kept continuous; and as quarrel scenes are so common in drama, even tyros at the art soon acquire a sort of expertness in this regard.

There is a passage in the celebrated novel "Handy Andy," which illustrates very well how easily continuity is maintained in a quibbling conversation. Now a novel is not the best place in the world to look for a dramatic example. Nevertheless, I submit in defense of this that its author, Samuel Lover, the grandfather of Victor Herbert, was a very successful dramatist in his day. The excerpt is from one of the tumultuous scenes at a village election in Ireland. An agent is examining a voter; and the colloquy proceeds at length as follows:

"You're a Roman Catholic?"

"Am I?"

"Are you not?"

"You say I am."

"Come, sir, answer. What is your religion?"

"The thrue religion."

"What religion is that?"

"My religion."

"And what's *your* religion?"

"My mother's religion."

"And what was your mother's religion?"

"*She tuk whisky in her tay.*"

"Come, now, I'll find you out, as cunning as you are. You bless yourself, don't you?"

"When I'm done with, I think I ought."

"What place of worship do you go to?"

"The most convaynient."

"But of what persuasion are you?"

"My persuasion is that you won't find it out."

"What is your belief?"

"My belief is that *you're* puzzled."

"Do you confess?"

"Not to you."

"Come! Now I have you. Who would you send for if you were likely to die?"

"Doctor Growlin'."

"Not for the priest?"

"I must first get a messenger."

"Confound your quibbling! Tell me, then, what your opinions are—your conscientious opinions I mean."

"They are the same as my landlord's."

"And what are your landlord's opinions?"

"Faix, his opinion is, that I won't pay him the last half-year's rent; and I'm of the same opinion myself."

"I insist, sir, on your answering at once, *are* you a Roman Catholic?"

"I am."

"And could you not say so at once?"

"You never axed me."

"I did."

"Indeed you didn't. You said I was a great many things, but you never *axed* me—you wor dhrivin' *crass* words and

cruded questions at me, and I gev you answers to match them, for sure I thought it was manners to cut out my *behavior* on your patthorn."

"Take the oath, sir."

"Where am I to take it to, sir?"

But the clerk was desired to "swear him" without further notice being taken of his impertinent answer. This sort of thing can be vastly amusing for a time, as this is; but audiences are ultimately fed up with it and demand a greater variety of entertainment. Quarreling dialogue is probably the best sort the novice writes, because it necessarily, through its very opposition, involves distinct points of view and a certain amount of dramatic action.

The novice will find it much more difficult to make smooth transition from speech to speech when his characters are not quarreling; but he will know from earlier chapters of this book that characters may easily be in opposition of some sort without quarreling at all. Once an easy, continuous transition is accomplished without too long an employment of any one device, the effect is highly pleasurable.

The continuity is always a continuity of thought, and to be that the thought must be clear. A sample of muddled thinking in this regard that comes to mind out of an amateur play, has four speeches that I am giving at the left as they originally appeared; and beside them, to the right, I am giving a version that shows the thinking cleared, with a corresponding gain in continuity.

"I am rich."

"I need not."

"I am powerful."

"You abuse it."

"I have money."

"I need none."

"I have power."

"You abuse it."

Fluidity of attention produced by dialogue may be studied at its best in the plays of Ibsen. No dramatist ever was more careful of what he set down than Ibsen. He knitted his plots so compactly, and made every ounce of value so pregnant with drama—which is to say with matters at issue—that it is difficult and probably impossible to find in his mature

works a specimen of inactive dialogue. What is more, his continuity is so complete that unless one starts at the beginning of an act, one cannot, it seems, lift out an example without betraying a broken connection with something that went before. Take this, from the scene between Nora and Krogstad, in Act I of "A Doll's House":

NORA. Well? Have I not made my payments punctually?

KROGSTAD. Fairly—yes. But to return to the point: You were in great trouble at the time, Mrs. Helmer.

NORA. I was indeed.

KROGSTAD. Your father was very ill, I believe?

NORA. He was on his deathbed.

KROGSTAD. And died soon after?

NORA. Yes.

KROGSTAD. Tell me, Mrs. Helmer: do you happen to recollect the day of his death? The day of the month, I mean?

NORA. Father died on the 29th of September.

KROGSTAD. Quite correct. I have made inquiries. And here comes the remarkable point—(*Produces a paper*) which I cannot explain.

NORA. What remarkable point? I don't know—

KROGSTAD. The remarkable point, madam, that your father signed this paper three days after his death! ⁵

Virtually every page in any representative Ibsen play will afford models of transition in dialogue. Re-reading a single Ibsen drama with just this in view is certain to be illuminating.

The citation from "A Doll's House" is suggestive in many directions. It is observable that in order to have one speech pick up where another leaves off, the controlling thought is placed toward the end of the speech—as it naturally would be anyway, for cumulative effect. When Nora asks, "Punctually?" the responsiveness of Krogstad is greatly assisted, his answer starting off, "Fairly—yes." Now, when a novice is first impressed with this idea of ending a speech with a suggestive cue for the next speaker to snap up, he frequently labors arbitrarily to put all the force of each speech in its last word, which is a mistaken effort.

⁵ Translated by William Archer, New York, 1906.

First of all, it often produces stiff, unnatural speeches. Without awkward pauses after them, disruptive to the flow of interest, the main points cannot always find time to sink into the consciousness of the spectator. When Krogstad says, "You were in great trouble," he has fulfilled all the fact needs of that particular speech; but by adding, "at the time, Mrs. Helmer," he permits the main point to acquire an impressiveness impossible in the shortened form. When he says, "And here comes the remarkable point—" he does not stop there, but produces a paper and adds, "which I cannot explain." This business of producing the paper tells the spectator that the mysterious, remarkable point is a tangible threat to Nora in the sole possession of Krogstad; and when he says that he cannot explain it, he is, from the standpoint of technical dialogue, throwing upon her, with great dramatic effect, the full burden of solving the unsolvable.

The fact is that the controlling thought of the speech depends for its force as much upon the emphasis it is given as upon its relative position in the flow of words. The eminent philologist Peter Giles, writing in the 11th "Encyclopædia Britannica" on the subject of accent, has pointed out that the five-word sentence "You rode to Newmarket yesterday" may be made to express five different statements merely by putting the stress upon each of the five words in turn. "With the same order of words," he continued, "five interrogative sentences may also be expressed, and a third series of exclamatory sentences expressing anger, incredulity, etc., may be obtained from the same words."⁶ It is this position of final *emphasis*, then, that is more important for the controlling fact of the speech, than its mere consecutive order with relation to *all* the facts in the speech.

In the matter of too steady a flow of continuity from speech to speech, there soon comes a feeling of monotony. It is like the singsong effect of a too-evident rhythm. In poetry they break this with an occasional short or analectic line—one of the many ways of "hiding the wheels." So in dialogue, the skillful dramatist—and who better than Ibsen?

⁶ Vol. I, p. 113b. Giles, in this same place, speaks of the sentence as the real unit of language.

—stops the flow now and then, but with such adroitness that he has it going again ere the threatened rupture is complete. This could not be, however, unless the flow of interest already had some momentum. When Krogstad asks, "And died soon after?" and Nora answers, "Yes," the flow of continuity has technically stopped. But Krogstad goes on instantly, without any apparent transition from the preceding speech, and says, "Tell me, Mrs. Helmer: do you happen to recollect the day of his death? The day of the month, I mean?" When she responds to this, "Father died on the 29th of September," the flow is broken again, for the line does not *require* a close-linked thought. Nevertheless, Krogstad ties it in with an unexpected comment—"Quite correct. I have made inquiries."

It is noticeable, moreover, that many speeches in successful dramas consist technically of two parts—a response to a foregoing speech, and a provocation of response in a succeeding speech. Why is this so? Well, it is because the interest of the audience is based not upon the shuttle effect of flying back and forth, but upon concentrated attention, and to concentrate, the human mind must be given time, now and then, to rest upon the subject. The attention is not merely carried from one character to another, but it is held briefly by each character in turn before being moved along, each speech exhausted of its full dramatic value before being supplanted by another. The same psychological principle is apparent in the practice of staging a play as a series of tableaux, each tableau sustained, whereas the changes of position from one tableau to another are accomplished as rapidly as possible—or rather, practicable. The actual transition in dialogue thus is usually *swift*: the emotion of the speech commonly is *arresting*—not always, just usually and commonly.

There is great temptation to me to follow out ramifications of these points and to build up illustrations; but this book cannot do everything, even if the author would—and after all, the purpose of the work is not to collect instances, but to cultivate in persons writing for the stage, a habit of mind in which they will be able to find instances for themselves.

SHIFTING ATTENTION

THE important structural phase of dialogue that still awaits consideration is the subject of directing audience attention from one character to another at will by means of the speeches. This matter was touched upon early in Chapter Thirteen in referring to one artificial manner in which attention is kept upon the central character in a star play, and all other persons on the scene are reduced to the status of "feeders." Star plays may be legitimate efforts, and they may be examples of overweening vanity and greed when the stars concerned refuse to permit a single handclap to applaud any merit but their own. In the last-named cases the cold scheming and man's inhumanity to man demonstrated by some popular "matinée idols" passes belief.⁷ But then again,

⁷ Much has been told about the devices resorted to by pampered stars to suppress meritorious work by players in their support, including one magazine article of yesteryear (in the *Sunday Magazine* of *The New York Tribune*, Nov. 10, 1912), by George M. Cohan, in which he dubbed them "murderers of the stage." My favorite general story in this connection was told me years ago by an old actor, and then printed as a matter of record in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*. Once upon a time, it seems a playwright wrote a play for a star in which the star was to play a cow. Bringing her critical faculties to the fore, the star listened while the playwright read his drama:

*Hey-diddle-diddle, the cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon;
The little dog laughed to see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.*

"Now I don't see," said the star, "why that strong scene where the dish gets the laugh, shouldn't be cut a little. The action should be carried on by the chief character; and surely the dish isn't important." So the playwright, having had productions before, took his play home, made the necessary changes, and then read it to the star once more:

*Hey-diddle-diddle, the cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon;
The little dog laughed to see such sport,
And the cow ran away with the spoon.*

The star pulled her nose thoughtfully. "You haven't done it yet, my dear boy," she said. "There's no reason in the world why that little dog should build up a comedy scene for himself when it's the cow that holds the interest and that the public is paying to see; and as to the cat and the fiddle, why they're doing away with orchestras now. I'll fix it myself." Accordingly, in due course, the play was produced and the playwright went to see it. He learned a lot. The action went like this:

*Hey-diddle-diddle, the cow and the cow,
The cow jumped over the cow;
The little cow laughed to see such sport,
And the cow ran away with the cow.*

I notice with interest that Mark Swan tells this same story, with minor variations, in his "How You Can Write Plays" (New York, 1927, pp. 222ff.), attributing it to Bronson Howard.

it is not to be wondered that any good invention will have subversive uses. Nor does it invalidate the invention that it is so employed.

The tendency of an audience is generally to direct its attention to the character speaking. The length of time that the attention remains fixed, depends entirely upon the degree of interest there to hold it. Frequently, the slightest distraction will draw it away; and on this account it is a tacit rule among honorable players that all save the actor dominating the scene shall remain quiet until that domination is ended, at which time he in turn becomes quiet in favor of his successor in the limelight.

I have a rare story with which to illustrate this point. It concerns the late Kenneth Douglas, a capital light comedian from England whose friendship and regard I was privileged to enjoy during his all-too-brief sojourn in America. He appeared, when I first became acquainted with him, as the leading character in a brisk little comedy that demanded great delicacy of work for its effect. His biggest scene in the play was a mere change of expression, the dawning of an idea—so it is easy to realize that his powers as an actor were well drawn upon. In one such moment, an over-ambitious young Thespian in his support, upon the stage at the same time, consistently and deliberately tried to spoil Douglas's scene with an apparently innocent but disturbing bit of business. He did this at every performance that I saw; and it was my business as press agent to witness a good many. Yet, curiously enough, the dastardly work never succeeded. Douglas always carried his scene triumphantly to the finish.

I often chatted with Douglas in his dressing-room early in the evening while he was making-up; and one night I ventured to speak to him of this annoying young bounder. "The amazing thing that I can't understand," I said, "is why that business, that in every other known case ruins the scene, does not even cause a ripple here." Douglas chuckled a little, and went on brushing the edge of the monocle that he wore habitually off-stage and on, with spirit-gum so it would stick to the make-up. Suddenly he held the monocle up for me to see. "You've noticed this, I suppose," he said; and

when I acknowledged the fact, he went on. "Watch it to-night." And forthwith he screwed it into his eye.

Needless to say I was an eager spectator of that scene a little later from the back of the audience. At the crucial point the unscrupulous cub started his business. But lo and behold, as he did so, Douglas, facing slightly in his direction, turned his head with great matter-of-factness toward the other side of the theater. A tiny but sharp beam of light, reflected in his precious monocle from the footlights, caught the straying attention of the audience and brought it instantly back to him. The villain, for his part, was visibly baffled and irritated. As far as I know, Douglas never revealed this secret to another soul; and it is not likely that the arrogant young actor whose meanness was happily so futile, ever will read it here. He quite certainly won't open these pages because he knew everything, even then.

When I say that all those on the scene but the actor legitimately entitled to the audience's attention, keep still (or engage in some business that will not distract) I do not mean that they ignore him. By giving him their own intelligent interest and attention, provided, of course, that that is consistent with the action, they can help him greatly to "put over" his scene. This is part of the so-called "art of listening" on the stage, one of the most vital considerations in acting.⁸ Charles Macklin at rehearsal, used to say to Macready: "Keep your eye fixed on me when I am speaking to you! Attention is always fixed. If you take your eye from me you rob the audience of my effects and you rob me of their applause!" Macready, commenting upon this in his celebrated "Reminiscences" (p. 22), says that this was a precept he never forgot and to which he was much indebted.

Psychologically, the audience is interested in actions and reactions—in actions when they are new and startling, or just new, and in reactions when there is something to be learned from them in anticipation. These circumstances are what afford the dramatist his opportunities to determine

⁸ An anecdote of Pinero on page 238 illustrates this same point. See also, "Listening on the Stage," by James L. Ford, in *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. XLII.

which way attention shall go. This is true in many phases of playwriting; but just now we are interested in its importance in dialogue.

If an actor begins his speech in this simple manner, "Would you care to meet that detestable person Guy Fawkes, King James?" the attention shifts automatically to the person addressed because King James is to react at once to the question. If the attention must not shift, the line might read something like this—"I'm sure you don't care to meet that fellow Guy Fawkes. I think he's a rascal." The speech does not now require an answer; and the attention remains upon the speaker. The other person is, of course, expected to say something; but, assuming the speaker to be a star from whom attention must not shift, the interlocutor's reply may be so constructed that it merely intensifies the attention where it is wanted. In that event the reply to the latest version given might be, "Why do you think he's a rascal?" Which drives back the attention before it may switch. If the attention must be given to the second person for an instant and then sent back to the first, the answer may be, "I do want to meet him. But why do you call him a rascal?"

It is to be assumed that these devices will be helpful to the general effectiveness of the play. They can be badly upset, however, by actors who know the value of pauses and intonation and who may prefer to achieve other aims. Nevertheless, the author can do much to safeguard his own intentions, and the long chapter now ended describes one way he can do it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LIVING SPEECH

DION BOUCICAULT once told Henry Miller—who was fond of quoting it—that: “The art of acting is not to forget there is an Audience present, in spite of what has so frequently been exploited as greatness. Remember always that you speak around a triangle.” Miller explained this as follows: “He meant that when an actor on the stage says to another actor, ‘You’re a thief!’ the consciousness of his words strikes the audience, and they turn to see the effect on the second player. He, in turn, answers, ‘You lie!’ and the words come back to the first player by the same route, around two sides of a triangle. Unless the words go around the triangle, unless they are transmitted, as it were, by the consciousness of the audience, there will be no Dramatic Illusion. This truth is too little understood. The actor can never forget his audience. And unless that third man, the audience, is playing his part, any scene will fail upon the stage.”¹

This conception of a different kind of “dramatic triangle” is not new to these pages wherein all playwriting is viewed as the audience presumably sees it; but the quotation serves to remind us that the effectiveness of dialogue in particular, depends altogether upon the reaction it produces in the spectators.

THE BREATH OF LIFE

THE audience asks that, among other things, dialogue shall be “natural,” which is to say, lifelike. Now being lifelike

¹ An article by Henry Miller in *The Saturday Evening Post* during 1910. This triangle was discussed also by William H. Crane in “The Greatest Theatrical Puzzle,” a valuable essay on the psychology of audiences in *The Sunday Magazine of The New York Tribune*, August 10, 1913.

is an excellent quality in stage conversation; but it does not necessarily follow from this that all artificiality of arrangement such as, for instance, that recommended in the preceding chapter, is taboo. It does not mean that dialogue should be literally like talk in ordinary life, but that it merely shall *have the appearance* of life—whereupon we come around once more to the familiar truth that a work of art is not life but an impression of life. This seemingly clear circumstance was not recognized by August Strindberg; but he voiced his opinion on the subject to a sensational extent. In the preface to his printed play, "Countess Julie," he says among other things:

In regard to dialogue I want to point out that I have departed from prevailing traditions by not turning my figures into catechists who make stupid questions in order to call forth witty answers. I have avoided the symmetrical and mathematical construction of the French dialogue, and have instead permitted the minds to work irregularly as they do in reality, where, during conversation, the cogs of one mind seem more or less haphazardly to engage those of another one, and where no topic is fully exhausted. Naturally enough, therefore, the dialogue strays a good deal as, in the opening scenes, it acquired a material that later on is worked over, picked up again, repeated, expounded, and built up like the theme in a musical composition.

Strindberg's purpose here, like the aims of so many other enemies of formalism, is on the face of what he says, less to approximate the spirit of life than to match its trivialities.

The symptoms that he recognized in the conversations of life, however—unfinished speeches, casual thinking, recurring ideas and so on—are used over and over again in the expert writing of dialogue, but merely as superfcials, as they really are in life. It isn't a new method. When Clyde Fitch was in his heyday, critics used to talk admiringly about his life-like dialogue, mentioning especially his unfinished speeches—unfinished, that is, without being interrupted—scattered judiciously through his text. Of course Fitch did not invent this device, and probably Aristophanes didn't, either. In fact, there is no great honor due the person who did, whoever he was, if incompleteness was the only merit he saw.

Speeches are only outward signs of states of mind. An unended speech (not interrupted) means just an unended thought. Even strong-minded persons utter such speeches at times, as when they are thinking along a certain line, and suddenly seeing the impracticability or the danger of the indelicacy of it, abandon it. But unless the states of mind call for unfinished speeches, it is rather silly for any dramatist to sprinkle them through his dialogue just on the ground that they are "natural."

The persecuted victim, cornered at last and turning on his tormentors, cries out at them, "You—! You—!" and stops not because his thought is incomplete but because he can find no word to express the rest of it. In fact, the scene probably would not be as dramatic if he did curse them to the end, because that would automatically limit and beggar the inflamed imagination of the audience. Nora, in "A Doll's House," says, "Oh, that foolish—" "What?" asks her husband. To which she replies: "I can't think of anything good. Everything seems so silly and meaningless."

When a speech is broken by interruption, the dramatist who is careful of his continuity usually endeavors to make clear what the speaker would have said had he finished. Thus the speech has reality and yet the chain of thought is complete. In Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus," because the audience knows in advance that the wizard has played tricks on four rustics, eating a whole load of hay that was in charge of one, giving an ape's head to the second, selling a magic horse to the third, and putting a dog's face on the fourth, the intent of each of the interrupted speakers in the following extract is clear:

CARTER. Do you remember, sir, how you cozened me and ate up my load of—(FAUSTUS *charms him dumb.*)

DICK. Do you remember how you made me wear an ape's—

HORSE-COURSER. You conjuring scab, do you remember how you cozened me with a ho—

CLOWN. Ha' you forgotten me? Do you think to carry it away with your Hey-pass and Re-pass: do you remember the dog's fa—

But it often happens that an interrupted speech is presently resumed and completed. However, the skillful dramatist then contrives the speech up to the point of the interruption so that it has a certain distinct and complete force as a fragment, the interruption serving somewhat in the nature of punctuation. There is such an example in "Cyrano de Bergerac":

DE GUICHE (*Recovering his self-control with a smile*). Have you read Don Quixote?

CYRANO. I have read it, and take off my hat to that hare-brained fellow.

DE GUICHE. Be so good then as to consider—

A PORTER (*Appearing at the back*). Here is the chair.

DE GUICHE. The chapter about the windmills!

CYRANO (*Bowing*). Chapter Thirteen.

DE GUICHE. For when one attacks them it often happens—

CYRANO. Am I attacking people who turn with every breeze?

DE GUICHE. That a windmill with its long canvas-covered arms hurls you into the mud!

CYRANO. Or rather among the stars!

(DE GUICHE *goes out.*)

In this instance the dialogue is the gainer for every interruption, and all are cunningly placed for maximum effect. At the same time it is to be noted that the interruptions are thoroughly interwoven with the characters and the flowing emotion of the scene. The dignity of De Guiche requires serenity and completeness that are thus badly jolted when the Porter cuts in about the chair and when Cyrano reminds him that the precise position is Chapter Thirteen. I need not comment on the remaining virtues.

CLIPPED CONVERSATIONS

DIALOGUE is, of course, an interchange of speech; but in the suddenly acquired passion for lifelikeness—spontaneity and speed—this does not mean staccato effect, or just three or four words for each character. How long a speech should be depends upon what is to be conveyed in it, the person utter-

ing it, the emotion of the scene, the tone of the performance, and probably many more things. It is all very well to boil a speech down to the most compact expression of its controlling idea, but too many successive speeches of that nature without internal warrant, give one the impression that the characters are all secretive about something and rather disagreeable because they are so grudging in words. I remember that when I attended the first New York performance of Augustus Thomas's play "As a Man Thinks," June 5, 1911, this was my first important impression after the curtain rose. The scene was a drawing-room in the residence of Dr. Seelig, an afternoon in late September. Vedah Seelig, a young girl, is at the piano, playing. There is the sound of a door closing. Vedah listens and then speaks.

VEDAH. Papa?

SEELIG. Yes.

VEDAH. Alone?

SEELIG. Alone. (*He enters from the hall. VEDAH meets and kisses him.*) Mother home?

VEDAH. She is lying down.

SEELIG. Is mother ill?

VEDAH. Only resting.

SEELIG. Ah—where is the tea?

VEDAH. It isn't time.

SEELIG (*Regarding his watch*). Quarter of five.

VEDAH. But no company.²

And telegraphic conversation of this kind goes on and on throughout the play. I cite it to illustrate an undesirable point, on which account it is but fair to the gifted author who wrote this drama to remark that the work as a whole is extraordinarily skillful and a worth-while contribution to adult thinking in the theater. The few speeches that are quoted here also demonstrate Mr. Thomas's admirable handling of the opening who, what, when, where, and how.

² This play is available in a library edition, New York, 1911. Barrett Clark illustrates telegraphic conversation of this kind in his "Study of the Modern Drama" (pp. 385ff.), with specimens from Eugene Walter's "The Easiest Way."

Poets are trained to give the essence of emotion in the fewest practicable words; yet even poets in the modern theater do not commonly condense their speeches so far. Speeches of this sort are like a tight skirt on a woman—they reveal form to perfection but limit movement. In other words, dialogue should have room to live and breathe like anything else robustious. I have specified poets in the *modern* theater because in the *old* theater conditions were different. Hence dialogue was different, too. In the poorly lighted playhouses of the past century it was the custom for an actor with an important speech to deliver, to step forward where spectators should see him best. Once there it was but right that he should have something at length to impart. Thereby the long speeches of a still earlier day were perpetuated. But when modern lighting brought reality to the theater by exposing the pitiful trappings of the old stages, stilted, flowery declamation went out and the conversation of the man in the street came in.³ It may be that for a time the old imagination went out too; but that is something else again. The implication here is that the change explains the enthusiasm in the '90's for short speeches, and perhaps this enthusiasm explains in turn Thomas's experiment with "As a Man Thinks" as late as 1911.

To set an arbitrary limit for the length of a speech probably would be carrying "rules" a bit too far. Nevertheless, I wonder if the motion picture hasn't something to suggest in this connection, and I offer the thought for what it is worth. For two or three decades, now, film editors have been learning how long a subtitle, or printed caption appearing on the screen between pictures, may be without making the audience restless. As a result, the average "title" now rarely totals more than twenty-four or five words. Some, of course, run up as far as forty; but the experts frown upon these. The length may also be estimated in running time. A title is kept upon the screen for a number of seconds corresponding with approximately two-thirds the num-

³ It is the opinion of Brander Matthews, in his "A Study of the Drama," p. 64, that Edison's invention of the incandescent bulb was the most potent factor in evolving the picture-frame stage with its realistic treatment.

ber of words, this presumably being long enough for the slowest reader in the theater to comprehend them. For a twenty-four word caption the screen time would therefore be about sixteen seconds, or a shade more than quarter of a minute.

Wherever the compromise may lie, between long speeches and short ones, there is no doubt that a great many long ones in a modern manuscript is a fairly good superficial reason for rejecting it. Numerous long speeches in a 'script of to-day are earmarks of immature work, whether the particular work deserves that reputation or not; an immature work rarely contains a dramatic kernel worth saving. Such lines suggest involved stories that need a lot of explanation. So, when a manager of to-day riffles through the pages of a newly-submitted play, the average length of the speeches is one thing that he especially notices. Be on your guard, therefore.

As many long speeches are symptomatic of dullness, so, conversely, many short ones point to lively stage action. I only said "point to," however. Mere movement is not necessarily an advance. It may be marking time. It is quite possible for a play with choppy dialogue to be as dull as dish-water. Without a doubt there are many dramas of that description in existence.

FINE WRITING NOT SO FINE

GOOD stage dialogue usually is rather bare and drab looking on the typewritten or printed page. When it reads well, that, strange as it may seem, is frequently a sign that the play is poor, another symptom of which many producing managers are aware and upon which they base harsh judgments. The reason for this is that when the whole story is nicely told in conversation it commonly means that none of it has been conveyed in any other way. The dramatist who tells his whole story in his words is not using the full resources of his medium of expression. There is an element to be supplied in physical action, for instance—and in many respects the most important element.

At this juncture some one will inquire, "Well, why isn't it possible to tell the complete story in the pantomime, and also in the settings, and in the dialogue, too, all running concurrently?" At first thought that sounds like an excellent working principle. It is not. The reason it is not is that with three separate kinds of appeal to attend, even though they all have to do with the same subject, the spectator's attention will be correspondingly divided, not intensified. Only one appeal should be made at a time; and that one should be the form that is best adapted to the purpose in hand. When words serve best, let us have words most certainly; when pantomime is more effective, then pantomime—and so on with all the other means that are available, but always with just one in the forefront of attention and the rest subordinated for the time. So, to suspect a play in which the dialogue does everything, really is rather sound judgment.

In this overdone phase the playwright with a partiality for rhetoric is subject to extraordinary temptation. He will dress his dialogue with lovely thoughts employing majestic figures of speech and will achieve in the reading of his play an emotional effect splendid enough to deceive even the practiced showman. He is a brilliant performer and hard to detect in the error of his ways. Our poets in the theater frequently work these wonders to their own ultimate undoing—betraying themselves by their incidental similes and metaphors into taking subject matter from outside the scene. The fact is that dialogue should grow out of the present materials of the action, concerning itself with emotion there evoked. And it should *express* this emotion—not *describe* it.

This does not mean that offstage happenings cannot be talked of effectively; it means only that those remote things must not be given precedence over emotions real and actually pulsating in consciousness of the audience. For instance, a dramatist showing a messenger coming to tell a devoted wife that her husband has just been killed, would probably be unwise to build his conversation out of an elaborate description of the death when the widow's reaction

(20) 14

Francesca

~~What you get the name of the~~
 Nobody but a name like Toby would
 see it, of course!
 (Enter Dunham and Mrs. Alhame)
 Nancy G.

I should like to inquire what you're
 all doing here. I came on the dot of 4:30, -
 hoping to learn I was the first. And that
 nobody would dish any dirt about me!

Thel

Nobody's even mentioned your name! - Meres
 Tim?

Nancy

My stately old husband with too few in the
 grass, standing on the sidewalk, refusing
 to come in, because he said he saw Dunham
 driving in the opposite direction with some
 Curtis.

Courtesy of Adolph Klauber

FROM THE MS. OF A NEW PLAY BY JANE COWL

A page from the first draft of an incompleated comedy. The strain of being an exceedingly popular star in America and England, has not prevented Miss Cowl from exercising her talents in other directions. With Jane Murfin she wrote the plays, "Daybreak," "Information Please" and "Lilac Time," appearing in the two last-named in the Broadway district and throughout the United States.

here and now is so much more vital. The description might be given, rightly enough; but it would be properly subordinated to the living, present idea. In other words, it is not merely that the conversation should be immediate in its action but the subject matter also. This is not always easy to determine. It involves, however, the same methods of consideration as are employed in deciding whether the action or the reaction is more important—the situation actually present on the scene being built up, if necessary, to outweigh the force of what has happened elsewhere, or the past event made present with some living symbol, or the distant brought close with a telephone, perhaps. The hypothetical scene of the new-made widow, just mentioned, is a case in point. Only at this stage of playwriting the problem would not normally arise. The decision would have been made long ago in formulating the scenario—if not still earlier in setting the bones of plot.

It is thus always the living thing that controls any given moment in a play. The difficulty about that is to make all things live at the special time when each is needed in the forefront of attention. If they have been so contrived, the major part of the dialogue necessarily will consist of a succession of present moments, too. It is inevitable, however, that some of the dialogue shall deal with past and absent matters.

“DO IT NOW”

IN THESE cases the expert dramatist, in his effort to make the lines as immediate and living as possible, throws them as much as may be into the present tense. Whether needed as a technical crutch or not, thinking of dialogue as being always in the present tense makes for greater effectiveness. Little John, being bullied by his older brother, calls to his mother, “George hit me!” But this is just a shade less active than, “George *is hitting* me!” In the same way, the old man recounting some incident of his youth, “dramatizes it” as we say, and thereby makes it more real for us. “And what did they do to me?” he begins. “Well, picture it for your-

self! There I stand, back to the wall, with six rifles pointing at my breast. The captain of the guard raises his hand to give them the signal to fire. All at once there is a sound of hoof-beats in the street beyond the wall, and in a moment more Dolores rides in, all disheveled and her horse all flecked with foam, waving a paper. The captain hesitates, his hand still in the air; but before he can drop it and send me to eternity, the girl thrusts the pardon into his fingers." That kind of personal story, moved up into now and made thrilling and vital, may be found many times in the popular old plays of Boucicault.

Perhaps this is just a trick, even if it is effective at times. There are many places in any play where the past tense serves more naturally than a twisting in this fashion could possibly make it. And yet the thought of present tense in dialogue is an excellent thing for a dramatist to keep in mind at this stage of his work. Many times he can stop himself in the careless use of a past tense when the present really will be more legitimate. It is but human for the playwright to be dimly conscious of the fact that after all he is telling a story and to let himself slip easily into the story-telling method. He should check himself with this knowledge. A character thus may be made to say, "I know about it," instead of, "I have heard of it," or, "He's guilty" for "He did it." "I've been here a fortnight" is thus, perhaps, not as active as, "This makes my second week here."

Similarly, many examples of the future tenses may be brought back to now without loss in story value. "I'd consult a doctor" is not as serviceable as, "My advice is—get a doctor," or "What *will* you call the picture?" as forceful as, "What *do* you call the picture?" Of course there is no random example that can be completely satisfactory because especial circumstances easily refute the apparent good judgment of these preferences. Good dialogue is too closely interwoven with, and influenced by, the action around it. On the other hand, the purpose here is not so much to provide impregnable illustrations as to develop in the dramatist a practical working habit of mind. So, as far as the particular point now is concerned, when it is said that, "We'll be

married some day" is not as dramatically sound as, "We're not married yet—but we're hoping," the good sense of the substitution is clear even if all imaginable attendant factors are not conducive to the change.

Still another aid to immediacy in dialogue is to draw the figures of speech from objects that are actually on the scene or involved in it. Henry Irving's instinct was correct, therefore, despite all the ridicule he received from later critics, when for certain comparisons in the text of "Romeo and Juliet" he placed real "set pieces" on the stage. The dying Mercutio was thereby enabled, when asked the extent of his wound, to point successively to a public fountain and a cathedral entrance actually on the set, as he replied,

'Twill serve; though 'tis not so deep as a well
Nor so wide as a church door.

Shakespeare, in "As You Like It," has the senior Duke refer to "the scene wherein we play" to afford Jaques his cue for the famous "Seven Ages of Man." Shakespeare has a player even call in the theater itself as a figure, speaking of it as a vast wooden O; and one of the classic Greek dramatists finds inspiration in the very tiers of benches on which the spectators sat, comparing them with the banks of oarsmen in a great trireme. Dialogue references to stage arrangements in extant plays of that distant day have afforded modern scholars their most dependable knowledge of the theater of the time.

To leap a mighty gap between ancient Greece and latter-day Broadway, I think of Frank McIntyre and his leading lady in "Snobs," a comedy by George Bronson-Howard. They portrayed the respective rôles of a milkman and the daughter of a pickle manufacturer. In making one entrance together, they were separated by a post which was a natural part of the setting. The girl pulled him back, laughingly exclaiming the old wives' catchline, "Bread and butter!" To which, incidentally, McIntyre retorted, "No; you mean pickles and milk!"⁴

⁴ I have known Cecil De Mille, while he was working up a story for screen production, to have elaborate settings actually built and waiting on the studio

There is force not merely in tying the dialogue in with the setting but in with the overtones of the action. Dialogue is composed, after all, not so much in words as in states of mind. Here, again, I think of an unexpected example. The gifted comédienne Blanche Ring, in "When Claudia Smiles," a bygone musical comedy by Anne Caldwell (that, as successful as it may have been, was necessarily far less important than the star), had a speech in which she told where she came from. It was a story made out of thin air as she went along. Listening to it, the audience had the pleasure of following her imagination as it waxed and waned through a multitude of burlesque details. I don't remember the words; but I do recall that when it occurred to her that it would be excellent policy to say that she was born in the South, her speech lapsed easily into a broad Southern dialect. When it suited her to speak of her fancied life in the wide open spaces of the Great West, she as naturally became a cow-girl in manner and tone. And so it went, as clever and as deliciously funny as, it seems, an effort of that kind could possibly be. Technically, it is a rich example of how changing emotions may be made to color dialogue.

These overtones of the scene, in more subtle sense than the foregoing illustration indicates, are the real excuses for poetic writing in dialogue. There it is always the spirit rather than the letter. Speeches then may be made to conjure up impressions otherwise impossible to produce—many of those things that constitute the *milieu*. The dialogues in the plays of Maeterlinck are richly suggestive here. But poetic intuitions must come out of the dramatist's own background of experience and culture; my statements can only hope to point to the fact.

It is possible, by fine descriptive writing, to elevate the audience without their realizing it, to an idealized intellectual plane that would be preposterous for similar characters in real life. Then it is that the crude rustic speaks with the language of Milton, and rich utterances of profound philos-

stages before the script was finished. At intervals he would pull away the screens and stroll through the sets, reconceiving his scenes in terms of their actual surroundings and then having his conclusions written into the continuity.

ophy come from the lips of children. Miracles of emotional uplift like this occur in Austin Strong's fine play "Seventh Heaven;" but to achieve them takes the temerity and the sure grasp of a trained, tried theater craftsman.

WHEN THREE OR MORE ARE TALKING

WHEN one thinks casually of the interchange of dialogue and transition from speech to speech, the scene conjured up involves just two characters. Of course many stage conversations have more persons in them than that—whole crowds, at times. There is a crowd in Gerhart's Hauptmann's powerful sociological drama, "The Weavers;" there is another used to fill the old-time theater which is the setting of Act I of "Cyrano de Bergerac;" there is a crowd of citizens listening to and commenting upon the speech of Mark Antony in Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar." In such circumstances playwrights naturally wonder, now and then, just how to handle conversation. Bernardino Daniello, who, in 1536, wrote what is commonly believed to be the first "Art of Poetry" in modern times, there set forth as a curious rule to guide them, that, "Four characters must not speak at once, but only two or three at most, while the others stand to one side quietly listening."⁵

The passage is a little ambiguous, but in being so, it raises two interesting points. In the first place, by speaking "at once," Daniello may mean that only two or three characters should ever speak simultaneously. If so, he was mistaken. Persons in life often do that very thing; and the dramatist, imitating life, has it occur judiciously in his text now and then. If simultaneous speeches are long sustained, however, obviously the audience is not going to be able to follow them. Even when they last just for a moment, the audience can appreciate their sense only by thinking back. So the trained dramatist does not even try to convey specific intelligence by this method. He merely puts over the general idea that a yelling mob is threatening, or jeering, or that a

⁵ Translation of Leander MacClintock in Clark's "European Theories of the Drama," p. 55.

table of women at bridge are gossiping breathlessly, and so on. Intelligibility of the individual characters otherwise does not matter. In which view it readily follows that there is no limit to the number of persons who may so speak.

When a playwright seeks only to convey these general ideas in his dialogue he frequently does not even trouble to write the whole conversation. He will set down just enough to give the general trend of thought and leave it to the actors to supply the rest. Thus, the manuscript will read, "Cries of, 'Kill him,' 'Long live the King,' 'Huzzah,' etc., *ad lib.*," by which is meant that those representing the mob will at that designated place, utter shouts at will, at their own discretion, *ad libitum*, for the indicated effect. "Ad-libbing," as the actors call it, is frequently used for voices offstage. Mrs. Caudle is heard in the outside bedroom giving one of her bed-curtain lectures *ad lib.* to Mr. Caudle; the children are heard upstairs in the playroom, violently quarreling *ad lib.*, or, on the scene, the old servant goes out muttering to himself *ad lib.*, while the important conversation elsewhere on the stage is resumed for the proper, detailed information of the audience.

If Daniello means, on the other hand, that a stage conversation must be limited to three persons at a time, he again has mis-read the symptom for the fact. In many dramas of Daniello's day it doubtless happened that clumsy play-making made dialogue involving three persons about as difficult to follow as any spectator would care to have it. But if Daniello might have seen the beginning of Act I of Galsworthy's "Strife," for instance, in which there is a tense board meeting of *six* important men, he would have at least modified his expressed view.

The real guiding principle is that continuity of thought is more important than the persons who utter the individual contributions to it; and as long as the interest is sustained, it does not greatly matter how many individual contributions there are. The speakers need not themselves be conscious of the continuity; that is for the audience to enjoy—a fact conveniently illustrated in that scene from "Cyrano de Bergerac" wherein the grotesque leading character sits in the shop of

Rageneau, the pastry-cook, writing to Roxane. He is so engrossed that he pays no attention to the others about him who are discussing his latest achievement in routing a hundred armed men at the Porte de Nesle, and who do not know that their Cyrano is the hero of it. Says one, "A terrible giant is the hero of these exploits!" Whereupon Cyrano, writing, is heard to murmur, "And I faint with fear when my eyes rest upon you."

To compose scenes with three or more engaged in the conversation is an excellent thing now and then. They lend extra variety to the action, for a series of scenes in each of which only two players appear, has been known to prove monotonous from that simple fact.

CHAPTER XXXIV

HE SAYS AND SHE SAYS

IF TWO characters are shown standing in a field at night, and their dialogue reveals that in the opinion of one the moon is as large as a bushel basket, while the other thinks it is only the size of a penny, the modern audience will not accept either view as literally true, knowing that heavenly bodies are measured by an entirely different scale.

So, strictly speaking, it is not necessarily what the character says that establishes or directly helps to establish the dramatic fact, but what the audience chooses to draw from the succession of speeches. What "he and she says" in an effective drama thus resolves itself to a mere collection of individual points of view; and the utterance of each character has the rating only of one person's opinion, just as it would have in real life.¹ The audience reads facts in the light of its own previous knowledge—that may or may not have been built up by the cunning premises of the playwright; and when to make a point the audience must combine deductions from a number of speeches any one of which, taken alone, would be insufficient and possibly far from the required structural truth, the dramatist would seem to be writing his play by a dramatic method. With dramatic method as in legal procedure, it is not the item but the sum of evidence that justifies the verdict.

¹ Says Lessing, in "The Hamburg Dramaturgy," No. 2, "I know full well that the sentiments in a drama must be in accordance with the assumed character of the person who utters them. They can, therefore, not bear the stamp of absolute truth; it is enough if they are poetically true, if we must admit that this character, under these circumstances, with these passions, could not have judged otherwise."

The individuality of speeches is, of course, much tied up with individuality of character in the broad sense—a subject that has been discussed at length in an earlier chapter; but a number of additional recommendations of value must come from a separate and more detailed discussion of this special phase.

THE AUTHOR'S MOUTHPIECE

IF SPEECHES of a character are to be individual, it seems unnecessary to remind the dramatist that the figure must not be a mere mouthpiece for his opinions. But it is so easy for even the experienced playwright to stumble into this pitfall that a word of caution must be helpful. Especially in "theme plays," dramas discussing vital matters, do characters rant forth their author's indignation. If the author feels his message keenly, he is all the more likely to forget that he is a playwright first and reformer afterward. The humaneness of his characters and the plausibility of their actions become obscured or destroyed in the intensity of the preaching.

In the novel, "*Les Misérables*," Victor Hugo expressly states that he has put aside his own, personal hatred of convents to speak of their fine inspiration for Jean Valjean.² In Ibsen's biting comedy, "*An Enemy of the People*," where one feels that the author must have believed in his message as sincerely as he ever did, Ibsen works at every turn to banish suspicion that the earnest and upright, albeit impractical, Dr. Stockmann is himself. The good doctor's noble principles are met as fast as they are uttered, by ridicule, and clever contrary arguments that are believable, too—notably through the person of his Burgomaster brother. Ibsen disclaimed Dr. Stockmann even outside his play, referring to him repeatedly in his letters and in his conversation as

² Hugo devotes Book Seventh of the section called "*Cosette*," to a parenthesis explaining his own private view of this subject. In the closing chapter of the Eighth Book, he specifically says: "Here we lay aside any and every personal theory; we are only the narrator. We are standing in Jean Valjean's place, and transferring his impressions."

"muddle-headed," and with other outspoken terms of good-humored contempt.³

While an author's enthusiasm for a fine controlling sentiment may easily carry him away, one does not readily admit this excuse where the situation is dispassionate and the character totally unfitted to utter the lines. However, in such case, if the dramatist is one who frequently has proved his care in keeping character and speech consistent, one may suspect a tampering with the text, as was very common in old plays where players built up parts to their own liking and interpolated their own lines. For that reason I have always doubted the validity of that passage in "Hamlet" wherein the pottering Polonius, giving advice to his departing son, Laertes, utters that inspired, unimpeachable counsel, "This above all—to thine own self be true; and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." In this philosophic penetration of truth Polonius is absolutely false to his character as established elsewhere; and I am almost certain that the fault is not to be laid to so sure a playwriting genius as William Shakespeare, even if he has shown himself now and then not to be infallible.

ENTRANCE AND EXIT LINES

IF THE dramatist has failed to make the character's speeches individual, the trained actor will do his utmost to correct it. The actor is a human being; and he naturally likes what he does to stand out. Moreover, the more he can do to be remarked, the sooner he is likely to be picked for advancement. He quite properly appreciates every legitimate opportunity to command attention. He wants it when he enters and

³ "The 'Raisonneur' (literally, the 'Reasoner') is a stock figure in many plays of the nineteenth century, and in the plays of Dumas *fils* serves simply as a mouthpiece for the author. He is often a dull and prosy individual. In England, especially in the plays of Pinero and Jones, we find him as a middle-aged, kindly man-of-the-world, the adviser who invariably sets matters straight and administers doses of good advice, ostensibly to the characters of the play but actually to the audience."—Clark, "A Study of the Modern Drama," p. 233.

when he goes; and, by and large (there are some unimportant exceptions), I have yet to see a valid reason why he should be denied. The legitimacy of "entrance and exit lines" is so thoroughly recognized in the theater that for generations they have enjoyed an especial place. They are to be found even in the classic plays of ancient Greece.⁴

Surveying them in a large field, it is observable that the entrance line usually aims to strike the keynote of the character's state of mind at that time, while the exit line is just a generally characteristic expression from which the character is likely to be remembered. For delivery of the exit line there is an especial technique. According to it the actor finishes his other utterance at the middle of the stage, strides in silence to the door, and standing there upon the threshold, speaks the line in question. He departs immediately thereafter. The method has often been decried and repeatedly burlesqued; but it has good sense underlying. The actor who uses the device not merely as a rule of thumb, knows that the attention of the audience is best concentrated when the players are in repose, and that the best place for a final speech is where the character can soonest disappear. It is a "trick."

Wherever, in all these pages, I have mentioned "tricks"—if one wants to call them that—or interpretations of basic principle that are recognized as expedient in the theater, I have been at pains to say that, "This is *generally* true," or, "That is common practice," or, "There are exceptions here." For the fact is that devices like these cannot be successful in all cases. The dramatist must use his head in applying them; and by this I mean that he must refer them to the great psychological laws of the drama that presumably he has so woven into his habit of mind that their proper expression has become instinctive.

WHEN CHARACTERS TALK SHOP

FIRST and foremost, perhaps, every character, being individual, has a point of view. The well-made character has

⁴ See Flickinger, "Greek Theatre and Its Drama," p. 311.

some point of view always, although it may change from what it was in the beginning. To reveal it, the favorite method in popular plays of the past century, was to consider the character for his occupation or chief interest in life, coloring his speeches with terms belonging thereto. The blacksmith in Boucicault's comedy, "Used Up," employs "Hammer and tongs!" as a favorite exclamation; the sporty old fellow devoted to racing, in dozens of other dramas by different hands, talks of the developing plot—whatever it may be—as being "stopped at the post" or "just getting in under the wire," and so on. One encounters examples of it in many modern plays. A present-day specimen that comes to mind is the artist leading character of Augustus Thomas's play, "The Model," who talks about, among other subjects, "getting a perspective on life."

Writing speeches to fit the character's station is a practice not only old but ancient. Aristophanes satirized it in "The Frogs," wherein Euripides and Æschylus defend their respective technical methods before the puzzled and sorely tried Bacchus:

EURIPIDES. But is virtue a sound?

Can any mysterious virtue be found

In bombastical, huge, hyperbolical phrase?

ÆSCHYLUS. Thou dirty, calamitous wretch, recollect

That exalted ideas of fancy require

To be clothed in a suitable vesture of phrase;

And that heroes and gods may be fairly supposed

Discoursing in words of a mightier import,

More lofty by far than the children of man.⁵

Sheridan had his fun out of it in "Jupiter," a forerunner of his "Critic," written in collaboration with a Harrow school-friend. The fun comes chiefly in a song by the title part which starts,

You dogs, I'm Jupiter Imperial,
King, Emperor and Pope ætherial,
Master of th' Ordnance of the sky;

⁵ Translation of J. Hookham Freere, "Everyman's Library."

while, according to the accompanying stage direction, the reference to ordnance is supplemented with a pistol or cracker fired behind the scenes—"a hint borrowed from Handel," as somebody says.

The method indubitably has its merits; but in its sanest form it is less commendable, after all, than the scheme that betrays not only the difference of characters in their points of view as dictated by their physical circumstances, but in their points of view *as colored by their opinions*. In real life a convincing botanist does not confine his talk to botany any more than a poet limits his to poetry. For examples of the influence of opinion upon words, one may go just as far back into the history of the drama, it appears, as for those of the simpler device just indicated. The most elementary form is perhaps represented in lines that are known in the theater as "gags." These are, in the present sense, verbal expressions of a character that he repeats at every opportunity throughout the play.⁶ The best known example in America is probably "There's millions in it!" which is the catchline of Colonel Mulberry Sellers in "The Gilded Age."

But the better method by far is to reveal the character's habit of mind not in a single speech uttered again and again, but each time in different words. The uniformly best practice of that may be found, I think, in the plays of John Galsworthy, whose characters are so thoroughly individual that in his printed texts one might suppress the character names and still know where the breaks come between speeches, which is the acid test of individuality in dialogue.

Fag, who is so eternally loyal to his master in "The Rivals," when asked about the identity of a certain young woman, responds, "That is Madam Lucy, my master's mistress's maid." Here we get Fag's individuality plus a betrayal of his point of view on the relative importance of persons. In one of C. T. Dazey's melodramas, when one character asks an

⁶ In the general sense, gag is the name for any line interpolated by the actor in his part. "Gagging" and "ad-libbing" are thus terms used interchangeably for this practice. In motion picture studios, almost exclusively in the comedy divisions, persons called "gag men," are employed to devise whole incidents for interpolation. On the broad subject of gagging the reader will find much of interest and value in Dutton Cook's admirable "Book of the Play," Chapter XXXI (London, 1876).

old negress if such-and-such a person is colored, too, the old mammy replies disgustedly, "No, ma'am; the poor fink am white!" which is in the same class with Fag's utterance. These are but chance glimpses of the real being of minor characters, not especially rooted in the plot, but having an incidental value in building up the pleasurable of the scenes in which they occur. It is much more profitable to hear the central figures of the play unwittingly reveal, through what they say, the elemental emotions upon which their characters are structurally based.

EFFECTS OF PERSONAL OPINION

AS LONG as a character talks at all, he cannot but betray to the discerning a clue to his state of mind. If he labors under stress of great emotion, this will be especially true because such conditions take characters unawares. But, the more unwilling he is to betray his state of mind, the greater will be the audience's pleasure in deducing it—wherefore it may be said that the highest pleasure there is in studying characterization comes when characters, under great pressure to reveal themselves, are best in control themselves. This seems to contradict what was said in the immediately preceding chapter about "clipped conversations"—that utterance too much boiled down gives characters an air of unpleasantness. That, however, was in cases where there was no reason for characters to withhold speech. The matter now has to do with a state of motivated resistance. We get dramatic action from the resistance, while curiosity is piqued because a man or woman with sufficient personal discipline to withstand organized attack, obviously has strength of character—from which follows the probability that there will be something to learn when the character's resistance is broken down. The less physical action accompanying, the more drama there really is in such scenes of character resistance. The action is there—tremendously there—but it is mentally, spiritually present; and this, to some minds, is of far greater importance. So it is that the plays of Ibsen, containing discussions that have rocked the world, seem to the unseeing critic of

their printed text, to be just words and nothing else. For an added refutation of this mistaken judgment I refer you again to what Maeterlinck said in "The Treasure of the Humble."⁷

A person always acts and justifies his acts out of his peculiar habit of mind. If he is a thief, he steals because he thinks that from his standpoint stealing is the proper thing to do. His thought may be only a vague sort of conviction, may never become articulate (true of most badly biased ideas), and his offense may be committed in the full knowledge that society will condemn it. Nevertheless, he acts according to the dictates of his mental bent. Consequently, in putting words into the mouth of a character, a dramatist ought to know in some measure, the mental state that fittingly *should be* behind the utterance.

This becomes a difficult matter when one recollects that characters are at their dramatic best when they are shown in periods of change, for not only the words must change, but, perforce, the point of view, the background of personal philosophy, must be altered with it. Moreover, the change cannot reasonably come all at once. The villain does not go through a play viciously striving to bring about the hero's overthrow, without a corresponding habit of mind—correspondingly hateful—that will be difficult to change in proportion to its strength. His mental state has become too well defined for him suddenly, at the final moment of the play, to become honestly contrite. If his sincere contrition is demanded by the drama's structure, there must be time for a complete rearrangement and shift of his point of view. Without this interval of transition, his voluntary pledges of reform will be sheer mockery of the audience's intelligence.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

IT SEEMS matter-of-fact to say that characters should employ manners of expression naturally belonging to them; and yet the dramatist's discretion is vitally needed even beyond the problems stated. In "The Dove," produced in 1925 by

⁷ See page 65 of the present work.

David Belasco, with Holbrook Blinn as the star, the action transpires in Mexico, and the native characters are required to converse not only with each other, but with aliens from over the border. When they talk with these Americans, they use a broken English; but as soon as they are obliged to converse just among themselves, an awkward problem arises. Out of deference to the New York audience they had to talk in English still. The audience readily accepted the convention and willingly supposed that the characters really were talking Spanish. But how was the producer to avoid the shock of having them talk broken English at one moment and flawless English the next? Belasco's action was to have the broken English used in all the scenes, even when the natives were alone.

Bide Dudley, the theatrical columnist of the New York *Evening World*, was so struck with this state of affairs in "The Dove" that in the issue of February 13, 1925, he invited his readers to suggest a better solution. As I remember, none was forthcoming. The problem was not a new one, however. Examples may be found in very old plays. A notable instance occurs in Shakespeare's "King Henry V," where, in a scene between the English king and the French Katherine, the latter uses broken English, but in all other places the French characters, speaking among themselves, use English without foreign accent. This, and other phases of the problem, together with the underlying philosophy, are authoritatively treated in the seventh chapter of "A Study of the Drama," by Brander Matthews; and any one interested in amplification of the point is referred there.

DIALECTS

THE average new playwright devotes more attention and care to dialect conversations than he does to plot construction. Care is important, of course; but the effort is usually spent in polishing degrees of sound and interpolating what are believed to be characteristic phrases, instead of in studying the underlying habits of mind. Out of this essentially

superficial method have come in large measure the caricature stage Frenchmen that most of America believes true to life, but that competent testimony declares—and my own personal observation attests—never have been seen on the boulevards of Paris. So also with the “silly ass” stage Englishman, that owes so much to the elder Sothorn’s “Lord Dundreary,”⁸ together with the strange figure that has avenged it, the stage Yankee, an example of which I viewed not so long ago at a theater in London, where, portrayed by Laddie Cliff, who really knew better, he energetically chewed gum, shambled his loose-jointed way around the stage, spat, and loudly boasted with a hollow twang, that he was a “hundred per cent American.”

Mispronunciation of words is not the real secret of dialect at all. It is the choice and arrangement of words dictated by a special viewpoint. As a matter of fact, in the best-written English dialects, the individual words are spelled as correctly as they would be in an essay by Addison. Where there are strange words they are mostly those that do not normally belong to the standard language; they are not perversions. The Irishman who refers to an *omadhaun*, a *shilleleh*, a *colleen* and an *acusbla machree*, a Scotsman who talks of a *braw* mist, of a *laverock*, and a *fissenless blatherskite*—each is using good words that belong to his own people, words that have the same character to the ears of the ordinary theatergoer as the foreign phrases relied on by an immigrant from Athens to New York to carry him across the gaps in a strange tongue.

It is just that. The immigrant carries *himself* across the gaps; but the native, to whom these interjected words are literally Greek, has to make other connections. So where the dialect is necessarily very heavy in strange words, the dramatist must make sure that there is enough of the sense in the intelligible parts to convey his meaning. The words of the finely done coster monologues of Albert Chevalier, during his tours in American vaudeville, were largely mean-

⁸ The play in which Dundreary appears, “Our American Cousin,” was by Tom Taylor; but the character was created and developed in its best-known form as Sothorn played it.

ingless to his audiences; but their emotion was unmistakable—notably that of his celebrated offering, "Old Dutch," that always won round after round of hearty applause. Some persons were disappointed in Graham Moffat's richly humorous "Bunt Pulls the Strings," in "A Scrape o' the Pen," and in the older "Bonnie Briar Bush," because they were unable to understand much of the Scotch dialect. Most of those persons no doubt have found definitions by this time and the next Scotch play will offer them no mysterious burrs—but that, I am sorry to admit because I liked them all, does not help those mentioned.

The reliance is to be placed upon choice of words and construction of sentences. Kipling is a master of this sort of thing—as he is in so many other respects. His collections of tales from all parts of the world are rich in suggestion to the dramatist who wants to learn the real nature of dialect. To be found in his pages are whole stretches of dialogue between Englishmen and natives in India where scarcely a word is mispronounced; and yet both are strictly in character. There is also there, somewhere that I cannot readily recall, a report written by a German, that would be a superb illustration if I could only find it. Not that Kipling does not also rely upon mispronounced words. His "Soldiers Three," for instance, mangle the King's English with a thoroughness to be envied in real life; but underlying in every case, is the infinitely more important individual point of view. Mispronunciations have a large place, of course. The point is just not to exaggerate their importance.⁹

Montague Glass completely eschewed the broad methods of Jewish comedians in drawing his famous Potash and Perlmutter. The speeches are not mispronounced words—with exceptions of names here and there—but expressions of character plus *misplaced* words. So one partner will say to the other, for instance, "No, a thousand dollars I ain't got it, Mawruss." Harris Dickson's negro stories offer many other examples of characteristic racial expression without strange

⁹ A curiosity in this connection is a character in John Crowne's play, "City Politiques" (1688), who speaks with all his teeth out. The author's preface gives the elaborate rules which govern his speech.

misspellings.¹⁰ The Indians of James Fenimore Cooper do not mispronounce their words, and yet there is no difficulty in separating their manner of speech from that of the white men concerned. For those who contend that Cooper's Indians, as he drew them, never really existed, I refer instead to the Indians of Fancis Parkman, those being historically true.

"BRIGHT LINES"

THE character's habit of mind is the true source also of bright lines. These are provoked by the emotions and exigencies of the scene, but they are primarily created by his peculiar view of these things. A sluggish mind will not consistently produce specimens of nimble wit; the kindly character will not convincingly utter scathing sarcasm. On which account the dramatist who hoards up other people's flashes of humor against that time when he may put them into his play like plums in a pudding, will still have trouble enough making them fit.¹¹

W. T. Price pointed out in his little magazine *The American Playwright* (November, 1913), that: "the dramatist who seeks a reputation for 'bright lines' may, without exception, be found to be a diligent reader of the comic papers, the witticism of which he cribs and paraphrases. His plays are dramatizations of his shirt-cuffs." Here one thinks of Florenz Ziegfeld who is said to spend much of his time away from the theater, accumulating jokes, gags, and incidents for inclusion in his next "Follies." One thinks also of the tremendous reputation for bright lines that was acquired in the motion picture field by Ralph Spence, whose work then was mainly "titling" comedy features, and of whom it was said

¹⁰ "Tell me why a writer does
Use the spellings 'sez' and 'wuz'
And perhaps you'll answer this'n:
What is gained by 'shure' and 'lissen'?"

—F. P. Adams. *New York World*, March 8, 1928.

¹¹ Shakespeare was not above using effective lines over again. "The world's a stage" may be found in "The Merchant of Venice" as well as in "Hamlet," while a good Shakespeare concordance will supply many other instances.

that he possessed and constantly kept up-to-date, a huge card-index of funny expressions.

To my mind, however, Ralph Spence—who also is the author of "The Gorilla," a highly successful Broadway mystery play—owes less of his fame to this catalogue (if it exists at all) than to a genuine sense of humor. The fact is that the best comedies have been written by persons with the best all-around comic sense. Such a person, putting himself into the position of a given character in a given play at a given time, will be struck naturally with the humorous possibilities latent there—and developing them, he will gain truest effect because all the parts will be so inseparable. Even Oscar Wilde, of whose "scintillating lines" it has been repeatedly said that they are stuck on his plays "like candles on a Christmas tree," was indubitably a humorist in real life and could not but have brought some of that rare sense to what he wrote. Many of his best lines are detachable from the context without especially upsetting that, it is true; but from this fact it surely does not follow that his whole comedy vein was divorced from his inspiration. So it isn't advisable to try to write comedy unless one has a flair for it.

The French classify *mots*, or verbal expressions producing laughter, as *mots d'esprit*, or flashes of pure wit; *mots de caractère*, founded, as the name implies, in considerations of character, and *mots de situation*, produced by the attendant circumstances, to which are sometimes added *mots d'auteur*, or recognizable author's wit, which probably is better put with the *mots d'esprit*.¹² As valuable as these fine distinctions probably are, it is unnecessary to go further into them here, for the essential point has already been made that a bright line is most effectively the individual expression of the one who utters it, whether it may be ticketed *mot d'esprit*, *mot de caractère* or *mot de situation*. It is observable that none of these divisions precludes the character's point of view. He may utter his line as a "flash of pure wit" that could as well have been uttered by some other character; but in the eternal fitness of things, it would have to be a char-

¹² Brander Matthews gives interesting specimens of the three first-named in his "Study of the Drama," p. 126 ff.

acter with as much natural penetration. The village half-wit thus could not reasonably, out of his own original perception, compose the following quip (that I here, for want of more immediate inspiration, crib myself out of an old comic weekly):

He placed his arm about her waist,
And pressed upon her lips a kiss.
"I've sipped," said he, "from many a cup—
But never from a mug like this!"

But a dozen other villagers of normal mentality, might easily have fathered the pun without challenging their ability to think along these familiar robustious lines of the comic valentine.

Here again, however, we encounter that grim truth that the dramatist must have back of the art of his expression—which here is the technique of playwriting—a personal philosophy of life, including a clear mind and arresting judgment, that he may first have something to express. Again, also, it is not the province of this book to supply that. At the same time I would like to do it if I could; and just as a token of the wish, I suggest that the earnest seeker after truth in connection with this subject of humor, shall read George Meredith's "An Essay on Comedy."¹³

A preponderance of bright lines interpolated in a play may be just an exuberance of imagination passionately crying for expression. Aristophanes just overflowed with wit. So did Sheridan.¹⁴ Rostand had so much that he could not resist carrying it into his very stage directions which, of

¹³ A lecture delivered at the London Institution in 1877, printed in book form, New York, 1911. The seeker might also read—although I dare say it is now very difficult to get—John Weiss's "Wit, Humor and Shakespeare," Boston, 1876. J. C. Gregory's "The Nature of Laughter," London, 1924, is probably the most important recent work on the subject, and is admirable. Max Beerbohm's "Yet Again: The Laughter of the Public" is especially useful for its many references to the theater.

¹⁴ It was Sheridan who said: "Wit being founded most generally upon the manners and characters of its own day, is crowned in that day beyond all other exertions of the mind, with splendid and immediate success. But there is always something that equalizes. In return, more than any other production, it suffers suddenly and irretrievably from the hand of Time."—*Notes and Queries*, p. 334, April 26, 1851.

Dialogue note - The Road Together L. Dora

The large pile of letters for line about first of month

last act line" Marjorie (Act 4)
 "were saying good bye in a house we've lived in for ten long
 years Good bye ~~Don't~~ let's look back
~~Kent~~
 Is there anything sure except what has happened? etc

~~Kent~~
~~What is it about?~~
~~Dora~~
~~Over the top what? They've got the~~ (ACT 2)
 Dora
 You do blame me But it's not too late *** We'll change all that
 now.
 Kent
 Change a habit.
 Dora
 I can do anything if it must be done. We can live on what we have.
 can't we?
 Kent
 And what of the bills?
 Dora
 Oh they can wait They've got the habit, haven't they?
 Kent
 Yes, I've paid nothing for months.
 Dora
 Then don't let's be too suddenly sensitive etc

**

Dora (Act 2)
 Was it hypocrisy not to hurt you? Why did I keep silent at all if
 not for your sake? Are you now going to blame me for that and for
 staying with you?

Oct 2 { On earlier with loving cup catches at door the idea that Kent
 is delaying trial. She registers her horror and then conceals it
 as she vaguely puts cup on pinna and then comes into group
 concealing her suspicions from Kent and covering them to Armour

(Act 2) run scene just the same up to

Kent
 The answer is obvious. I'm out of the race.
 Dora (to herself)
 I was sure of you.
 Kent (puzzled)
 That's odd.
 Dora
 What are you going to do when your terms expires?
 Kent
 Why cross bridges? Speaking of anonymous letters " —
 run scene just the same **

(here is where the cut comes of Dora's line
 "I can't think of you out of public life" + Kent
 hesitates & speaks.)

Courtesy of the Author

"ROAD TOGETHER" DIALOGUE NOTES BY GEORGE MIDDLETON

Illustrating the dramatic method of jotting down ideas as they come and putting them in place later. Mr. Middleton won his first great success in the theatre by dramatizing "The House of a Thousand Candles." The amazing variety of his work since is accountable only by the fact that he is an astonishing compound of poet, business man, sociologist and entertainer. On one hand he writes, "Embers," "Tradition" and "Nowadays," and on the other, "Polly With a Past" and "Adam and Eva." Or we see him as literary editor of "La Follette's Weekly" and also champion and head of the Dramatists' Guild.

course, are lost (as directions) to the audience. In describing the setting in Act III of "Cyrano de Bergerac," he remarks the knocker on the door as being "bound with linen like a bruised thumb;" and the description prefixed to each act in "Chantecler," is written as a sonnet. In Barrie's "The Admirable Crichton," the author privately notes that Roger, the page-boy, who cries, "Hear! Hear!" in the midst of the Earl of Loam's speech to the servants, "grows up, is married and has a large family of children, but is never really heard from again."

CHAPTER XXXV

MONOLOGUES

THROUGHOUT all this insistence that a character's individuality and point of view are important, I have withheld comment upon what are, to casual notice, at least, the most individual forms of his verbal expression. I refer to monologues and asides. These are popularly supposed to be the most direct glimpses into a character's soul, for in using them he is generally believed to be heard by no one but himself.

Now it happens that virtually every one communes with himself. We call it thinking. If thinking is a normal process, commonly understood, it ought to be worth while and effective to show it in literature. Well, it *has* been shown in literature these many centuries. Authors of stories written to be read have interrupted their narratives to tell frankly, in their own persons, what their characters thought about various things. In the novel, "Ulysses," James Joyce tried to make an end of the means, carrying it so far that he put down all the trivialities that his characters thought about everything for twenty-four hours a day. The main thing Joyce achieved by doing this was to prove what sloppy, degenerate thinkers most persons are—but that's something that needn't concern us here.

SECRET SPEECHES

IF THERE is merit in showing directly what characters are thinking, unscreened by the formalities of ordinary social intercourse, the stage should profit from it, too. Only, in a play the author cannot well speak in his own person; and

that makes it somewhat more difficult. The problem was solved cleverly by Alice Gerstenberg in her playlet, "Overtones." Two characters there conversed as formal people do in life, while two more, representing the real selves, stood behind them and uttered their true thoughts. A solution at once unique and effective, however much it may suggest the plan of the ancient Greek tragedies where large choruses played conscience to the principal characters, weighed their chances and gave them good advice. Eugene O'Neill, in "Strange Interlude," employed another idea which was to stop the plot at intervals and have the characters speak out their own real thoughts for themselves. Everybody soliloquizes then. But such methods cannot be employed commonly; and the dramatist must turn back to an older method which is for the character itself, in lieu of the author, to express its own thoughts in a soliloquy. However, this older method is in bad repute, mainly because people in real life do not ordinarily talk aloud to themselves about their secret feelings. What may seem even more distressing is that it no longer is generally employed. That, in the words of the old man who actually did talk to himself, one likes to talk to a good man as well as to hear a good man talk, seems to have no real validity as an excuse.

George Calderon, in a preface to his translation of one of Tchekhov's plays, says that: "To banish that other kind of solitary speaking by which a man conveys to the audience what is passing in his mind when they could have no other means of learning it, is altogether a mistake. For what, after all, is the subject matter of a play? It is not mere outward action; it is also thought and will culminating in action, and this latter element is, to the judicious spectator, 'much the noblest part' of drama, and indeed, with Tchekhov, the greater part; for his plays, rightly understood, are more than half soliloquy; the characters seem to converse, but in reality sit side by side and think aloud."

One cannot well object to Calderon's declaration that "thought and will culminating in action . . . is, to the judicious spectator, 'much the noblest' part of drama;" but the positive implication that a spectator is not judicious unless

he believes that *soliloquy* is so, calls for prompt challenge.¹ I believe, upon grounds that I think have been rather well established in preceding chapters, first, that the audience does not enjoy volunteered information as much as information wrung from characters by force of plot circumstances, and, second, that there is no state of mind, however subtle, that cannot be expressed dramatically without recourse to monologue or soliloquy.² There are special cases of which I speak later. Calderon supposes a condition in which the spectator "could have no other means of learning" the information; but I cannot conceive of a situation that has any dramatic value in the first place, that could not be shaped with a little ingenuity to convey its full meaning by ways entirely legitimate in real life. There is the story of Robinson Crusoe—but how much *drama* is there in that as long as Crusoe is alone? This, of course, is clearly a matter of opinion. I bulwark my opinion, however, with this extra consideration: since the banishment of the soliloquy at the close of the nineteenth century, we have had far more—both in number and degree—intensive psychological studies of character in plays than we ever had before.

It seems to me that Calderon's alleged mistake in judgment lies in not seeing that the audience derives its knowledge from more than one fact, from more than one speech, from speeches and actions together. From two distinct facts in combination it may even deduce a third fact that is not literally given at all upon the stage. The spectator has a kind of omniscience, a perspective on everything. Hence, no single fact is accepted for itself alone. It is always taken in the additional sense of its relation to other parts of the plot design, a sense unshared by any character whatsoever. A character seen as a devoted soldier in the enemy camp, and

¹ It must be confessed that the challenge here is not very prompt. Calderon's preface was published nearly fifteen years ago.

² The words soliloquy and monologue are commonly interchangeable; but I suppose that in strict definition a marked difference might be established between them. In the theater—the American theater, at least—monologue usually means a recitation by one person whose performance constitutes one complete number in a given entertainment, such as a vaudeville. By soliloquy, on the other hand, is understood a passage in a play in which the speaker thinks aloud, regardless of the presence or absence of others, but usually with no sense of any other character hearing him.

then presently among our friends trying to ingratiate himself with them, needs no soliloquy to identify himself as a spy; and yet that may be information absolutely unknown to any other character, and that has not even been breathed upon the stage.³

ARE THEY NECESSARY?

WHEN one tries to get at the root of the matter by determining just how important it can ever be to use a soliloquy in a play, the accruing evidence only strengthens the conviction that there is no time when the play cannot *conceivably* get on without it. Without it might mean reconstruction; but probably the drama would be the better for that anyway. When celebrated monologues are passed in review they are found to group themselves as personal views of relationship, as that of Shylock concerning Bassanio; reflections upon the consequences of a deed, as those in "Macbeth;" making up one's mind as to a course of action, as those in "Hamlet;" and conveying to the audience the necessary premises of the play, as the remarkable opening one in "Richard III." Soliloquies of the last-named type are so obviously structural subterfuges that they may be dismissed as having nothing primarily to do with revelation of a person's innermost feeling. That just cited from "Richard III," is a compelling revelation of character, too; but it is essentially an account of those circumstances antecedent to the beginning of the play, that made this character what it is. The other types of soliloquy certainly reveal deep, personal feeling for its own sake, but always, it is to be observed, as something incidental to the actual plot movement. What I am getting at is that

³ This truth was clearly seen by John Weiss, an American writer whose penetrating essays have been permitted to pass from public view along with those of another stimulating native commentator on the theater, Denton Jaques Snider. In Weiss's essay on the Porter in "Macbeth,"—in "Wit, Humor and Shakespeare," Boston, 1876—he contemplates with De Quincey, the soul-stirring effect of the knocking on the gate which comes in "Macbeth" after the murder. He says: "It not only makes known to us that human life recurs, and thus emphasizes our sense of the inhuman world of murder, but it also startles us with the sudden consciousness that the human which thus recurs *does it in entire ignorance of the scene at which it knocks.*" The italics are mine.

even the best soliloquies are not *strictly necessary* to the story. It is quite certain, to give specific instances, that the five great soliloquies of the hero in "Hamlet" are of such secondary structural importance that they were added by Shakespeare to his play some time after its original production, for they occur only in the folios and not in the earlier quartos. And, paradoxical as it may seem, I, for one, would not want to dispense with them.

Having recorded my private belief that the soliloquy merited banishment as a common dramatic device, it now is time to speak of those special cases in which stage soliloquies impart a high degree of audience pleasure. There indubitably is pleasure in an emotional narrative, even if it is not as dramatic as may be, just as there used to be a kind of pleasure in witnessing a clever song and dance interpolated without special warrant by the leading man and the comedian in one of the old cheap melodramas. The audience, there, had to accept the temporary assumption that living characters would normally do such things. Otherwise they, the audience, would lose that much extra enjoyment. Not to yield to so trifling a convention for the sake of the fun involved was manifestly foolish. So it is in the instance of an interesting soliloquy. The audience is just as ready to strike a bargain with the players. All they ask is that the convention involved shall not require them to stretch their credulity too much. Thus, it is permissible in certain circumstances, to pretend that a character would do his most important thinking aloud; but, if the movement of the plot depends not upon the thinking, but upon the thinking *aloud*, then the spectator, himself, is likely to do some cogitating—to the effect that: "This is too thick even for a good-natured person like me. People just don't do such things!" And obviously, the spectator must never be permitted to get into such a state of mind.

Audiences found considerable amusement, some years back, in a long monologue in a play called "Sleeping Partners" (from the French of Sacha Guitry and with Irene Bordoni and H. B. Warner in the leading rôles). Here a personable bachelor, keeping a rendezvous with a fascinating lady

inconsistency that should not, in the interest of all possible effectiveness, be there.

"LISTENERS-IN"

IN THE plays of the late century (and for a long time previous) important characters had their confidantes who traveled about with them to say yes and no whenever the principals wanted to unburden their minds. They met, in a rough-and-ready way, that constant, pressing need of "some one to talk to." These puppet characters, grossly abused, became far more absurd than soliloquies could be because, in the majority of cases, they were not used for any other purpose. Only an occasional master-dramatist, Dion Boucicault, for instance, made them belong to the warp and woof of the plot. Their rank and file has been pretty much laughed out of existence now; but there really was a useful intent in having them.⁵

Where can that poor beast Caliban find a sympathetic soul into whose ear he can confide the troubles of his benighted existence? The drunken Trinculo soon proves himself unworthy even of this poor trust. And yet see how the mature Shakespeare ⁶ justifies a soliloquy for Caliban:

All the infections that the sun sucks up
From bogs, fens, flats, on Prosper fall, and make him
By inch-meal a disease! His spirits hear me,
And yet I needs must curse. But they'll not pinch,
Fright me with urchin shows, pitch me i' the mire,
Nor lead me, like a firebrand, in the dark,
Out of my way, unless he bid them.

Even knowing that he has no sympathy, Caliban is obliged by the fierce promptings of his nature to talk anyway. He is cursing Prospero whom he cannot otherwise injure. Moreover, he has hearers, and knows that he has them. In this magic environment there are listeners even when no other

⁵ See also p. 301 for other uses of these minor characters.

⁶ It is the consensus of feeling among scholars that "The Tempest" is the last play that Shakespeare wrote.

living thing is to be seen. There is question, indeed, whether or not this example, having listeners, may properly be called a soliloquy. I am inclined to think not.

Probably the most interesting listener in all dramatic literature is the Fool in Shakespeare's "King Lear," a mixture of folly and profound wisdom, who, wandering through that nightmare scene on the storm-swept heath with the mad King, his master, is the one person whose listening and whose answers can lend intelligibility and pathos to what there transpires. I know of but one other dramatic creation like this, and that is the crazy Eph, in Alice Brown's "Children of Earth," who voluntarily and even eagerly accompanies the deserted Portuguese wife, Jane, through the woodland, meeting her involuntary utterances of despair from the depths of a torn, agonized spirit, with suggestions of suicide and temptations to lesser madness that will snatch her irretrievably to where he now stands alone in the ghastly twilight of tottering reason. In her mental tumult Jane is really talking with herself; but that particular self, the evil genius that so gleefully anticipates her ultimate destruction, is here made horribly real for the audience, personified in this gibbering half-wit who himself has stood so long closer to the brink that he thrills to his vision of chaos, and wants her to realize it, too. This, to me, was the outstanding touch of genius in this play.

The guilty feeling of dramatists that they ought not to have characters talk to themselves, supplies the student with an almost inexhaustible variety of examples. Just the other day I noticed that the press agent for "The Mystery Man"⁷ claimed originality for the device of having the character Robert Wheeler, return to his apartment in a state of intoxication, and utter a soliloquy to his discarded coat and hat. He says (so it seems), "Old coat, raise your right hand and solemnly swear never to take another drink." And also, "Little hat, to-morrow will be the biggest day you ever had." But here again the case is a very special one. Strictly speaking, it cannot be a solution of the real problem presented

⁷ By Morris Ankrum and Vincent Duffey, produced by Gustav Blum, January 26, 1928, at the Bayes Theater, New York. The press story appeared in the *New York Herald-Tribune* of February 12, 1928.

by soliloquies in general because it has not their strained unlikeness to life. In life, as it happens, drunken persons do babble to themselves. No more would I see a magic talisman in the besotted private comments, punctuated with hiccups, of Stephano in "The Tempest." They are just the characteristic, natural talk of an intoxicated man. And as for persons uttering a sentence or two while they think, there's an example of that even in Ibsen's "A Doll's House." ⁸

"INHUMAN" CONVERSATIONS

WHAT is one to say about prayers and incantations? What about that inspired state called, "speaking with tongues?" Persons praying may be alone in all human sense. Persons may be alone when they are engaged in some weird ceremony, such as that of Faustus, in Marlowe's play of that name, when he conjures Mephistopheles to appear—"Sint mihi Dei Acherontis propitii! Valeat numen triplex Jehovæ! Egnis, æris, aquæ, terræ spiritus, salvete! Orientis princeps Belzebub, inferni ardentis monarcha, et Demogorgon, propitiamus vos, ut appareat et surgat Mephistophilis." And so forth. But these are instances in which the subjects are not truly alone, whereas being alone seems to be the objectionable feature. They are instances, however, in which men are removed from their ordinary relationships of real life. They are inhuman conversations. They deal with a spiritual world where it is easy to believe that miracles occur.

If the whole air of a performance is unreality as in fantasy or farce, the spectator will not expect reality and will "make believe" to almost any desired degree. A musical comedy has no trouble about all kinds of extravagances because it assumes at the outset a peculiar world in which the characters frequently express their serious emotions in song and dance. Monologues are accepted there, consequently, without question. The monologues of Mathias, in "The Bells"—the drama adapted by Leopold Lewis from "The Polish Jew," by Erckmann-Chatrian, and that long provided

⁸ NORA (*Stands awhile thinking; then tosses her head*). Oh, well! He wants to frighten me. I'm not so foolish as all that. (*Begins folding the children's clothes. Pauses.*) But—? No; it's impossible. I did it for love!

Sir Henry Irving with one of his greatest acting parts—have been effective even in strictly modern times because the play assumes that the audience sees with the eyes and hears with the ears of the central figure who is haunted by the man he murdered long ago. The audience there sees visions, representing hallucinations of the guilty man, that appear behind a gauze drop in an alcove at the rear of the stage. In their ears also ring the sleigh-bells that torment the killer's fancy, although no other character in the play hears them—or sees the pictures.

When a monologue is used to convey information that ought to come from the movement of the plot, the spectator is impressed, either consciously or not, with the sense that a story is being devised for his entertainment and not that he is witnessing a true event. If such a monologue occurs early in the play while the premises are being established, the device is not especially annoying; but if it happens in the midst of a line of action and is used to provide one of the important links of that action, it will be more deeply resented. So, if a dramatist feels that it is necessary to employ a monologue of that kind, he will minimize its disadvantages by placing it where its trickery will be least noticeable, where it will be least seen in relation to other cogs in the machine.

ASIDES AND APARTS

IN OTHER words, the more reminders that exist of the unreality of a device, the less effective will that device be. That is why the monologue, or soliloquy by a character alone on the stage, is much more readily accepted than the aside, which is a private remark made in the presence of others but not supposed to be heard by all of them. Just because the others are there makes it difficult for the spectator to imagine them out of earshot. Resented just a little more than the aside is the apart, a remark also made in the presence of others, but not supposed to be heard by any one. This makes the strain on the spectator's imagination that much harder.

As a convenient illustration of both, I submit a passage from "The Tempest." On the scene are Prospero, his daugh-

ter, Miranda, and Ferdinand who is to become her lover. The dialogue begins with an "aside" conversation between Prospero and Miranda which is theoretically unheard by Ferdinand; and presently, within that aside, Prospero has a speech that is an apart, this presumably not heard by Miranda either.

PROSPERO. The fringed curtains of thine eyes advance
And say, what thou seest yond'.

MIRANDA. What is't? a spirit?
Lord, how it looks about! . . . But 'tis a spirit.

PROSPERO. No, wench. . . . He hath lost his fellows,
And strays about to find them.

MIRANDA. I might call him
A thing divine; for nothing natural
I ever saw so noble.

PROSPERO (*Apart*). It goes on, I see.
As my soul prompts it.

Although Prospero and Miranda are irreproachably upright characters, the aside, as a technical device, necessarily has an air of sneakiness about it. Not to be heard by everybody, it of course cannot easily stand as the utterance of a frank, open nature. Which probably is why it is used by stage villains more than by other characters. Anyway, to prove that this appropriation is an ancient practice, I herewith trace it back to the Garden of Eden.

This particular Garden of Eden is in the Grocers' Play of the Norwich Pageants, the manuscript dated about 1565, when dramatic art was just emerging again, out of the Middle Ages. On the scene are the Serpent, Adam and Eve, and God the Father. The Serpent starts with an aside calculated to delight the "heavy" of any latter-day melodrama.

The Serpent spekethe

Nowe, nowe, of my purpos I dowght nott to attayne;
I can yt not abyde in theis joyes they shulde be.
Naye! I wyll attempt them to syn into theyre payne;
By subtylty to catch them the waye I do well se;
Unto this, angell of lyght I shew mysylfe to be,

With hyr for to dyscemble; I fear yt nott at all,
Butt that unto my haight some waye I shall hyr call.⁹

Forthwith he sidles, or wriggles, up to Eve and speaks to her. Without following that historic situation further, I may say again for emphasis, that many good characters have used the device as well. The villains seem to have used it more; that's all.

The distinction between aside and apart is not a vital matter, and in writings about the theater, they are commonly and indiscriminately called asides. Quite certainly Edgar Allan Poe attached no importance to the difference when he attacked them jointly in a criticism of either N. P. Willis's "Tortosa, the Usurer," or Longfellow's "The Spanish Student." He said then:

The prevalence of the folly of "asides" detracts as much from the acting of our drama generally as any other inartisticity. It utterly destroys verisimilitude. People are not in the habit of soliloquizing aloud—at least not to any positive extent; and why should an author have to be told what the slightest reflection would teach him, that an audience, by no dint of imagination can or will conceive that what is sonorous in their own ears at the distance of fifty feet, cannot be heard by the *dramatis personæ* at the distance of one or two.

On the whole, I would say that this seems like healthy common sense. And if poetic feeling and insight could have made a difference, certainly Poe, as a poet himself, was in a position to appreciate their requirements. W. T. Price once remarked, I remember, that a wink to another, a glance, a significant movement unseen by the second character, and the like, may easily be the equivalent of an aside. On the other hand, I must not let my personal feeling debar the dramatist from any advantages that he may perceive in the use of any or all of these devices.

⁹ Given by John Matthews Manly in his "Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama," Vol. I, Boston, 1897.

THE INTELLIGENT WAY

TO RESUME the consideration of how the recognized disadvantages of *aparts* and *asides* may be minimized, it may be remarked again that the fewer suggestions there may be on the scene to remind the spectator of the unreality of the given device, the easier it will be to "put it over." According to this view, the nearer the *apart* may be brought to the status of the soliloquy where there is nobody to listen in, the less of a jolt it ought to be to the audience. One way to accomplish this modification was employed by Shakespeare. He just put the characters who had to remain on the stage while the *apart* was going on, to sleep, so that they couldn't hear it if they wanted to. One such case is in the first act of "The Tempest." When Prospero wants to discuss with the fairy, Ariel, certain matters that his daughter should not then know although she is present with him on the scene, he magically reduces her to slumber. In another situation in the same play, that Antonio and Sebastian may converse about private matters, Ariel charms the unconcerned ones to sleep with music. But, of course, this method cannot be recommended in other than magical dramas.

Some especially interesting examples of monologues, *aparts*, and *asides* may be studied in Rostand's "Cyrano de Bergerac." He used them—and he knew very, very well how to avoid them, too. In his opening act he has a large company representing an audience in a theater. As one would suppose, it is exceedingly difficult to conduct a number of separate but simultaneous conversations in such a situation without making them technical *asides*—and yet, by confining most of the speeches to such remarks that it wouldn't matter even if strangers on the scene did hear them, he avoids semblance of artificiality. Out of mere snatches of private dialogue from the various groups—from the fencers, from the guard and the flower-girl, the players, the bourgeois and his son, the mischievous pages and so on—the audience is enabled to build up a unified impression. The *asides* begin only when the pickpocket and his class in petty thievery, naturally anxious

that no one shall overhear them, start to speak among themselves.

The point is that Rostand knew his theater. He was one of the few playwrights of all time—of a class with Shakespeare—who knew when to compromise with the laws of drama for the preservation of valuable irregularities in his material. But he had to know those laws expertly first, that he could properly evaluate the exchange. He knew that he was violating common sense when he gave soliloquies to Cyrano—the French are an eminently common-sense people, anyway; but he also knew, like Shakespeare with the soliloquies of Hamlet, that for his transgression he was compensating with a rich insight into a great heart of a noble creation. So even a stickler for rules, such as I am, must add a *bravo!* when Cyrano, standing unseen by Roxane beneath her balcony, and knowing that Christian, who now holds her triumphantly in his arms, was given that conquest wholly and solely by his own promptings, is heard only by the audience as he says:

Ah! What a strange pain in my heart! O kiss, feast of love, at which I am the Lazarus, a crumb of thee comes to me in the darkness—yes. I feel that my heart receives a little of thee, for on those lips whereto Roxane is lured, she is kissing the words that I have only just now spoken!

But stay a moment. I said not long since that much technical license is permitted in plays of magic. Surely this moving scene of deep emotion, with formal barriers broken down, is magical, too!

PART ELEVEN

PRODUCTION

CHAPTER XXXVI

INSPECTION ¹

IF this chapter is not unique, it is certainly unusual. Authors of playwriting books have generally felt that having told how to build a drama, it is a confession of weakness to say that then it ought to be revised. A well-made play, it would seem, does not need revision. But the fact is that before the first draft of any play leaves its author's hands it ought to be tested for its strength and weakness, and then revised if necessary. The dramatist is not deceiving anybody but himself if he neglects this extra assurance.

Boucicault seems to have been the author of the celebrated maxim that, "Plays are not written but re-written." Anyway, he may well have said it because he believed in the practice and observed it consistently throughout his professional life. The expression would also fit either the elder or younger Dumas. But no matter who said it, it is in effect true of virtually every successful piece. Quite invariably, first drafts should be sent with other vagrants to the House of Correction. The necessity of such revision is promptly recognized by all practical men and women of the theater. Intelligent objection comes only when for "revision" some one reads "substitution," which, of course, is a vastly different matter. For a play that has been conceived so badly that the whole basic structure has to be thrown away, I can only advise its author to start reading this book at Page 1 instead of at this late point.

¹ See also suggestions at the close of Chapter XXIII.

REVISION OF WELL-MADE PLAYS

WHEN an architect plans and supervises the building of a house, it is not to be supposed that he will then proceed as his own unforced fancy dictates, to shift the scheme of chimneys and dormers and stairways and plumbing. But the erection of a house is not all that makes it livable. It must be decorated and furnished; and in the last-named process, at any rate, there is room for the realization of much changed opinion. So with the final inspection of a play.

And yet, indeed, there are times when both house and play require basic changes. As far as the house is concerned, it often happens that a dwelling, although admirably planned in the relationship of its rooms and various other internal economies, is seen upon completion to be ill adapted in other respects. While the building has been going up, the external world has been changing, too. The architect was painstaking in his accommodation of house to site; but nobody thought about how dependent things were on that grove of maples on the north and east sides, between the house and the hill and the house and the lake. At about the time when the framework was up, the maple trees were cut down and the stumps blasted out. And now that the house is completed, the unobstructed wintry blasts from the lake make the fine living-room untenable and the hillside slope sheds water into the foundations. There simply must be a modification of the original plan. As to the dramatic parallel, Atherton Brownell was confronted with a condition of this kind when his peace play, "The Unseen Empire," in which Elsie Ferguson was to have starred, suddenly encountered the strained state of affairs immediately preceding America's entry into the World War. The play was at once withdrawn as a matter of managerial discretion.

The analogy of building a house and razing a maple grove has some point. At the same time, it does not altogether express the full idea which is that when a whole play is actually in hand, on paper, it is much easier to apprehend its values than it was in that protracted earlier period when so many of these values existed just in the author's mind. Ex-

pert playmaking is too complicated a matter for any human being to be sensible of all the requirements at every moment; and no author of a playwriting book can fairly assume his readers to be such infallible machines. A degree of forgetfulness before the drama has left the workshop, is entirely reasonable to expect and to provide for.

It may be that no serious adjustments will have to be made, the dramatist having reasoned his way so surely that all, every detail, has come out just as he intended it should. It may be that this has happened. Perhaps. But I'm sure that I never heard of such an astounding feat. Revision is nothing of which to be ashamed. Even Shakespeare revised his plays despite the seeming testimony offered by Ben Jonson to the contrary.² If he did not, surely some one who was his equal both as poet and as dramatist, added those excellences that make the later quartos and the folios so much more valuable to the theater than the earliest published forms of his plays. Of these differences, and others, George Pierce Baker has made extended, valuable use in his "Dramatic Technique."³ Moore, in his "Life of Sheridan," tells of the great amount of revamping done by that dramatist on his plays. "The School for Scandal" was rewritten many times, characters changed

² This reference has so frequently been quoted without its full sense that I give the complete passage: "I remember the players have so often mentioned it as an honor to Shakespeare that in his writing, whatsoever he penned, he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, 'Would he had blotted a thousand,' which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this but for their ignorance, who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candor, for I loved the man, and do honor his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent fancy, brave notions, and gentle expressions, wherein he flowed with that facility that sometime it was necessary he should be stopped. 'He ought to have been clogged,' as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too. Many times he fell into those things, could not escape laughter, as when he said in the person of Cæsar, one speaking to him: 'Cæsar, thou dost me wrong.' He replied: 'Cæsar never did wrong but with just cause;' and such like, which were ridiculous. But he redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned."—Ben Jonson, "Timber: or, Discoveries," edited with introduction and notes by Felix E. Schelling, Boston, 1892.

³ William Archer points out, however, in his Introduction to A. G. Chater's "From Ibsen's Workshop" (New York, 1911) that, "In a comparison of the early quartos of 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Hamlet' with the completed plays . . . we cannot decide with any certainty how far the incompleteness of the earlier versions represents an actual phase in the growth of the plays, and how far it is due to the bad stenography of the playhouse pirates."—p. 7f.

and developed and dialogue polished. "The Rivals" was a bad failure when first produced, but Sheridan promptly revised it and its success then became a matter of theatrical history.

In Dryden's dedication to "The Spanish Friar" (1681), he says: "For my own part, I have both so just a diffidence of myself, and so great a reverence for my audience, that I dare venture nothing without a strict examination; and am as much ashamed to put a loose, undigested play upon the public, as I should be to offer them brass money in a payment."

Henrik Ibsen, who beyond all cavil was a careful theater craftsman, revised and revised and revised again. William Archer, in his Introduction to A. G. Chater's translation of notes, scenarios, and drafts entitled, "From Ibsen's Workshop," has this to say of the great Norwegian's working habit: "How much he relied upon the final revision of his work is apparent from a curious expression of which he makes use in a letter to Theodor Caspari, dated Rome, 27th June, 1884. 'I have just completed a play in five acts,' he says; and then adds: 'that is to say, the rough draft of it; and now comes the elaboration, the more energetic individualization of the persons and their modes of expression.' The play in question was 'The Wild Duck.' Any one who compares the draft . . . with the finished play will see that what Ibsen called 'elaboration' amounted, at some points, almost to re-invention."

WHY GOOD PLAYS DIFFER IN STRUCTURE

IN THE abstract discussion of dramatic principle, the guiding thought in mind has been the perfect play which probably is an impossibility—that is, if by "perfect" we understand a play in which all merits are equal. Material out of which a drama is made, quite invariably requires compromises with certain principles in order to derive double benefit from others. In this intelligent sense, successful, admirable plays differ in their fundamental structures. They have traded some advantages for others; and this, as preceding pages frequently attest, is sound, commendable practice. But whether the said compromises have worked or not cannot be satis-

<p><i>Colonel's Ladies</i> <i>Fannie Heaslip Lea</i></p> <p><i>22</i></p> <p><u>SARGENT</u> Feeling pretty snappy? (to Haidee) How'd you people get away from the Club so long before we did?</p> <p><u>SOPHIE</u> Oh -- ^{have you} you've been to the Club?</p> <p><u>CECILE</u> Yes -- Vincent happened across me downtown, ^{quite late} the afternoon... ^{simply} just when forlorn...I wanted dreadfully to go to the tennis finale -- and William-John couldn't take me -- he had a faculty meeting....</p> <p><u>HAIDEE</u> (sweetly) Your meal-ticket?</p> <p><u>CECILE</u> (disconcerted but very gentle) I don't understand, Haidee darling.</p> <p><u>VINCENT</u> My God, Haidee -- what a line! Takes you to pull it!....</p> <p>How are you, old dear? (throwing arm around Sophie. She removes herself from his hold imperceptibly)....I didn't go to the city after all -- wire from the man I was going to see, changing the ^{the date}</p>	<p>^{you} to have</p> <p><u>SOPHIE</u> (to Cecile) Sorry I missed you, this afternoon ^{wish to get you at lunch-time} this is fine too busy</p> <p><u>CECILE</u>. (nervously) Oh--you mean...^(frightened glance to Vin for reinforcements)</p> <p><u>SOPHIE</u>. You were here this afternoon--before I got back--I think....</p> <p><u>VINCENT</u> (with a hearty laugh--to Haidee and the rest) Almost ran into you peopledidn't we? Thought I saw you going out the driveway....</p> <p><u>HAIDEE</u>. ^{it's a} Small world--haidee! (demurely)</p> <p><u>VINCENT</u>. (to Sophie) Well-- after I met Cecile and started for the Club-- we stopped by here--tried to pick you up--and you were out--place was deserted... funny, how damned empty a house can seem without one little woman...^(sentimentally)</p> <p><u>SOPHIE</u>. (coolly) Bertha was here.</p> <p><u>VINCENT</u>. Well, then, by Gad--you ought to fire her!^(righteous indignation) the</p> <p>House wide-open and not a soul answered the bell....</p> <p><u>SOPHIE</u>. (interrupting) Mr Cassidy--will you give Mrs Ritchie a cocktail?</p>
<p>(Cecile sits down beside Emily and accepts a drink from Cassidy with great sweetness)</p> <p><u>VINCENT</u> Don't I get one?</p> <p><u>SOPHIE</u> ^{Are you waiting to be asked?} You mustn't help yourself--don't you?</p> <p><u>HAIDEE</u> ^{No service at} So far as ^{this is home, Sophie --}</p> <p><u>VINCENT</u> How's it holding out, Cassidy? I'll shake up another.</p> <p><u>CASSIDY</u> I'm afraid you'll have to -- (he hands the shaker over to</p>	

Courtesy of Brock Pemberton

FROM "COLONEL'S LADIES," BY FANNIE HEASLIP LEA

Among the plays announced for production by Brock Pemberton for the season of 1928-1929 was this work by an author previously known as a writer of fiction. The page illustrates principally the manner in which matter interpolated in revision is pasted where it belongs.

factorily judged until the whole play is there to see. In brief, it is no reflection on me, or any other author of an abstract discussion of technical method, that a playwright, endeavoring to observe the canons, chooses to interpret them to his own ends, and then is advised to check back to make sure that his private interpretation has been successful.

Moreover, although in the writing of the play each part presumably has been thought of for itself and in its relation to all other parts, everything now, the instant the whole structure "clicks" into place, as they say, acquires a new aspect. This apparent, new, extra life probably has been there all along. The sudden sense of its presence is due, perhaps, just to the fact that the dramatist, for the first time, is able to give himself up completely to the emotional sweep of the full continuity. He is not now creating; if he has any writing to do, it is only shaping. Brushing away all the scaffolding and débris of construction, he stands back from his work, in a manner of speaking, and sees it for the first time as an entity not deriving its life from him, but detached from him, living and breathing for itself. The playwright's work at this stage becomes, therefore, critical rather than creative, and legitimately so. The first step of such criticism probably means no more than just reading the 'script without thinking of any of the technical requirements, and striving just to get the emotional force of everything. But this, in view of the fact that the dramatist has been so close to his own work, and has become so fed up with it, seems no easy thing to do. The most difficult achievement in all playwriting is for the working dramatist to keep re-creating in his own mind the first impression to be gained by the audience that sometime will view, and presumably will like, his play.

COLLECTING OPINIONS

TO SOME minds, an excellent way to meet the difficulty is to have the play read by somebody unconnected with the theater and presumably an average playgoer, who knows nothing about the story, and who therefore can testify to original impressions. Granting that the reader is one who is

able to visualize from the written page—which in the case of the average person outside the theater is only a remote possibility—there still remains the great trouble that even strongly sympathetic theatergoers can seldom analyze their own feelings. They will give opinions, of course, for they feel obliged in the circumstances to do that; but those opinions are rarely dependable. I remember one instance of a person like this who “simply hated” the manuscript of what turned out to be an excellent play, because she detested nicotine and the hero smoked cigarettes!

A method of obtaining outside opinion that sometimes is one degree better, at least, is for the author to read the play aloud to a victim, closely observing reactions all the while. Molière, it is said, thus used to try out his plays on his housekeeper. Thus also, many a young dramatist, less celebrated, has inflicted his masterpiece upon his relatives. However, there are so many mitigating circumstances in this practice, too, that I cannot recommend it either as the regular thing to do. On the whole, I would say that if a dramatist must have such opinion, he will be safer in soliciting it from one who has some knowledge of the writing craft. It is probably more to the point to pronounce a dramatist wiser for never seeking opinion until he has reached that stage where he knows he has done everything in his own power to make it complete. Fishing for opinions before the possible work is done is a likely sign that the author craves flattery, which never helped anybody.

Professional playwrights rarely discuss what they are doing in the workshop. They feel themselves strong enough to carry on alone, and also, they don't want to be side-tracked by outside conceptions of what they ought to do and how they ought to do it. To which some cynic will say that they really keep quiet because they don't want their ideas stolen. That may be true, too; but it is a fact learned out of tragic experience that taking the world into one's confidence and following all the gratuitous hints therefrom, is as sure a way to ruin a good play in the making as it is to spoil the proverbial pot of broth. Ibsen was so secretive about his playmaking that during the process he wouldn't even mention a char-

acter's name to his own family. Goethe, too, was a believer in silence.⁴

STANDING IN THE SPECTATOR'S SHOES

IF THE playwright can achieve or approximate, by any means whatsoever, that state of mind in which the new audience will receive his play, he may read his 'script to himself, and stop to analyze only when some dullness or inconsistency breaks the spell. He may not stop even then, but may defer the analytical part till he has come to the finish and may view everything in retrospect. That is how the first-night newspaper critics work. Frequently they do not even make up their minds about plays until they are seated at their typewriters, summing up the evidence. So the working dramatist should not make up *his* mind fully, even about his own play, until the evidence is all in. But how can he do it even then, if he has lost his perspective?

I find it a little difficult to explain how he can; but I know from what I have developed as my own working habit, that it is possible. I can take a stage play or a motion picture that I have intensively revised, and reviewing it as a whole a few minutes later, actually can respond to it as I would to an entirely new experience. To account for that useful "gift," I find an analogy in the work of an artist at his board. He makes guide-lines and, as his picture advances, he rubs them out. Sometimes he does not rub them out, but, needing them for further use, he only *imagines* them out, seeing his picture clearly, although to the casual eye the work looks like a jumble. When he needs some trivial object in the background to complete the balance of his composition, he may tentatively sketch in a flower-pot, or a bridge-lamp, or a staircase, erasing them successively until he finds the one he wants, or not erasing them at all, but drawing one atop the other. Whenever he wants to he can recall that he drew a flower-pot and a bridge-lamp before deciding on the staircase, but for the purpose of his work he can blot them com-

⁴ On Ibsen's secretiveness see especially pp. 5ff. of William Archer's Introduction to Chater's "From Ibsen's Workshop." Goethe's statement about his own working habit already has been quoted in the present work, p. 107.

pletely out of his mind—the more easily, of course, if he has left nothing there to suggest them. So does the dramatist, by an effort of will (that practice makes not such an effort), erase from his mind for the present moment of action that constitutes the measure of knowledge for the audience, all that does not belong to it. I suppose that a psychologist would say that it is simply a developed concentration. But whatever it is, it actually exists, and it certainly helps in this profession.

With all of the dramatist's loss of perspective when his whole play is on paper at last, he still may be his own best critic. If he honestly feels afraid to go on because his perspective is then distorted (and not just because he craves admiration), he will find it excellent medicine to put the manuscript on a shelf for a couple of weeks and to plunge whole-heartedly for that time into some other activity, preferably an outdoor one. The added power of a refreshed viewpoint when he returns will be amazing. But even without this refreshment, with all his intimate knowledge of his own play crowding upon him to defeat his aim to anticipate the fresh, uninformed view of the audience to come, the author still remains his own best critic, for he has as part of his professional equipment, a knowledge of the obligations of his art; and he may test the satisfaction of these, laboriously but certainly, one by one.

The first important inquiry for the dramatist to make about his own, newly "finished" play, is whether or not it has succeeded in "putting over" the desired general impression. If it has a message to deliver, has it been effectively conveyed? If it is merely to amuse, has it done that? If it is to evoke goose-flesh, has it been creepy enough? I have my own opinion about what plays ought to do; but that's beside this present point. Every alert dramatist has his notion, too, about what his play should accomplish—that is, as far as its effect on the audience is concerned; so I am now suggesting only that he shall make sure that this general effect has been achieved. The answer to his question will also tell him whether or not a revision is necessary, and the guiding principles to such correction I have already discussed for his

information. When one comes down to it, it appears that the dramatist's principal requirement in the process of revision, is to know what questions to ask, for the answers are so inevitably yes or no, and point the way so clearly.

THE AUDIENCE IS SATISFIED

HAVING determined that the general effect is satisfactory, one of the next broad matters to be decided is whether or not the ending of the play is final and complete. In raising this point I have no intention of starting a controversy. I merely mean that the dramatist should make sure that the audience will be satisfied that the case, with which he has presented them, is complete as far as he wants it to be. Writers are frequently of the opinion that having entertained the audience, it doesn't matter whether there is an end or not—in the conventional sense. I personally differ with that view, believing that when a playwright raises an issue, he is in honor bound, as far as the stage story is concerned, to settle it.

Galsworthy's "Strife" is popularly cited as a play without an end. A labor leader and a capitalist, irreconcilably opposed in honest principles, hold out so long that their respective constituents make their own separate peace. But the play really has an end—not the end sought by either capitalist or labor leader, for Galsworthy did not make his dramatic opposition between them, but between them jointly on the one hand, like Romeo and Juliet, and the suffering constituents on the other. The peace, therefore, is a conclusive stop demonstrating the author's first intention which manifestly is to show the folly and the waste of uncompromising battle.

There is also the same author's "The Pigeon,"⁵ which has to do with a tender-hearted artist preyed upon by picturesque but unbalanced people of the streets, who, warmed and sheltered in his poor studio, bring tragedy to his door. The artist's daughter works constantly to make her father say

⁵ Somebody has suggested that "The Pigeon" as a title, is pointless to American ears, and to apply here, as it does in England, should be changed to "The Gull." I doubt, however, that the substitute would have made any appreciable difference in the play's popularity.

these sinister people nay, and finally, in desperation, moves to another place where they cannot find him. But at the end the old man secretly leaves his new address where the harpies can find it. Because the artist's weakness has not been corrected, and because there is reason to believe that the harpies will return to his life, using the memorandum he has left them, one may say that here again is an unfinished play. But it is finished—in a deep, psychological sense. Galsworthy has not asked his audience at the outset to do more than view his masterly portrait of an incorrigible philanthropist. This portrait he has disclosed in the setting of a typical experience involving a woman of shame and a vagabond philosopher. The single chapter in the artist's life is definitely brought to a close with the disposition of the two drifters. It is a mere accounting for the artist that shows him leaving his new address and going on his way. The suggestion of his future in no way affects the finality of the composition.

Any end that the audience looks for, and is properly disappointed at not receiving, is the logical working-out of matters that the dramatist has placed in solution—logical in the light of the premises that the play has provided. In most cases it is this working-out that should be the body of the play because, for reasons that the reader must know by now, that is generally the most pleasurable part of the action. If, therefore, the dramatist prevents this natural development of the situation by some arbitrary act such as having the hero commit suicide—when that only leaves the situation in a hopeless snarl of which the remaining characters must make the most because the hero is not there to carry on—the audience, without reasoning why and acting altogether out of its subconscious sense of incompleteness, naturally resents it.⁶

A common misunderstanding of this basic fact has led to most aggrieved utterance on the subject of the "happy ending." As a matter of record, the audience is perfectly ready to accept the tragic end if the constructive work that the play has set out to do is accomplished first. Ending the play

⁶ Much depends, of course, on what a given people considers a complete settlement. In ancient Greek tragedy it was not enough that the hero died; he must also have a funeral—because of the importance of burial in Greek religion. See Flickinger, "Greek Theater and Its Drama," p. 282.

arbitrarily before that is destroying its completeness. That is why the ancients so condemned the then common practice of having a god descend from Olympus to set aright peremptorily the situation that the dramatist had not the wit or the energy to see through for himself. The *deus ex machina*—the god from the machine (the machine being the stage device by which the deity was wafted from above)—remains a term of opprobrium to this day, chiefly because the sloven crudity it symbolizes has never passed from practice.

But the dramatist, or any other responsible person in the theater, should not judge endings as they usually are rated, namely, by their superficial aspects. A death does not necessarily mean an unhappy ending any more than a wedding always denotes a happy one. The death of Sydney Carton, I say again, is really a happy ending for Dickens's novel, "A Tale of Two Cities." There are, as was remarked in the foregoing account of Galsworthy's "The Pigeon," fine psychological reasons to be considered before an ending may be adjudged an ending. Those critics who did not weigh these, caused Ibsen to write an alternative "happy ending" for "A Doll's House"—an impossible finish that was soon suppressed. The printed text of Pinero's play, "The Big Drum," carries a preface explaining that after two performances the author, much against his principles and conscience—and Pinero is one of the best theater craftsmen of his time—provided an ending in which the hero and heroine were reconciled instead of separating as they do for the reader. But to my mind, whoever argued the matter with Pinero was in large part justified. Ending with the separation meant to the audience that the two persons concerned had made a mess of their relationship and couldn't go on. *They didn't work it out*—and because Pinero centered all attention upon them and gave no other element that would work out—as Galsworthy did in "Strife"—he was cheating the audience as surely as though he had had the characters shoot themselves or jump off the dock together. Ibsen's Hedda Gabler ends her life with a pistol, but at that point the whole story has gone as far as it can go.⁷

⁷ See "A Note on Happy Endings" by St. John Hankin in the third volume of his "Dramatic Works" (New York, 1912). Also the very interesting bit

That exceedingly popular, excellent, and perennial play, "In Old Heidelberg" (in musical and film versions, "The Student Prince"), also has a sad ending that could not be otherwise, for the action never permits the audience to suspect a weakening of the rigid social system that forbids Prince to marry bar-maid. In this latter-day tragedy Aristotle surely would have found in generous measure, the pity and fear that he so earnestly recommends.

It is a pretty good rule to have everything in the play situation finally settled when the last curtain descends—that is, not to have any loose ends, not even little ones. Some of the insurgent younger playwrights take the stand that the audience likes to be kept wondering about the future; but it seems to me that generally speaking, the audience after the play likes to wonder not about what the characters did then, but whether or not they were right in what they did during performance. They, the spectators, *should* have something to think about after the play is over; and this is the recommendation of many dramatists. H. A. DuSuchet referred to this when he used to say, "Always give 'em a package at the end to take home." In all events, the playwright must find it illuminating to make a list of the matters he has left unsettled, the characters unaccounted for, and from that to determine just how much he gains by not tying their fates all in at the finish.

ENDS OF ACTS

It is in this same period of inspection that the author should make sure of the completeness of each act and of the interest that ought to carry across the intermissions. Completeness of the act deserves comment again largely because it is almost as much misunderstood as the "happy ending." Besides, the novice will want to be initiated into the mysteries of the "tag" or "curtain line," and the "wow." Only the novice will care much about those things.

How to make the act complete as a full stride forward

in Clark's "Study of the Modern Drama," p. 379f., in which other examples are cited and judged.

along the main line of interest is an old story by now. I am thinking, rather, of the instinctive efforts of all concerned in a play performance, to make what has happened seem important whenever the curtain comes down. At the close of any act save the last, this generally takes the form of a kind of summary that at the same time has a view to the future. The hero, trapped by the villain in the old mill whither he has been lured for a supposed rendezvous with his sweetheart, is taunted by his captor, and replies, "You have me where you want me now, my friend; but I give you fair warning: beware to-morrow!" Whereupon, with the situation rounded out—probably far more neatly than I have supposed it—the curtain swiftly descends. It may be that the situation has just come to that point where the villain has imposed the last straw. The hero, meek until now, suddenly arises and sweeps aside the table between them to leap upon his tormentor, only to be held back by his friends. But from this position of temporary helplessness he cries with suppressed fury, "Go—but from now on you have me to reckon with!" And the curtain descends.

These instances are exaggerated to bring out the essential facts of summary and intermission interest. Similar examples will be found, however, only less obviously, in the plays of our best dramatists. Pick up any celebrated play—of Ibsen's, let us say—and you will find them. I was about to cite one or two; but they are so woven into the situations they conclude that they would lose force unless explained in detail. They are not always words. Sometimes a simple action tells the story. The young lover, having just said farewell to his sweetheart who has but now confessed that she cares, remains alone in the room and proceeds to vent his feeling by turning handsprings till the curtain falls. But it's the same sort of thing. The master criminal, concluding his 'phone conversation with his intended wealthy victim, hangs up the receiver; and as upon his evil face dawns a slow smile of triumph, his fingers clench into a tight fist that symbolizes the crushing of the supposedly simple fool—and again the curtain.

Yet, it is not always the curtain—quite so soon. The sum-

mary may be extraordinarily tense, so much so that the audience is lifted out of itself in a kind of painful ecstasy. In this supreme moment the dramatist has learned to snap the spectators out of their hypnotic condition with something so incongruous to follow, that taken unawares and off guard, their emotion bursts its barriers in a flow of laughter or tears. Thus theater once more gives its blessed purgation. While this flow of emotion is still at its height, the curtain slaps down.

There are some excellent illustrations of this in Galsworthy's fine play, "Justice." At the close of Act I, poor, weak, defaulting Falder is placed under arrest and taken off. He is fairly gone when Cokeson, the managing clerk, "spins completely around and makes for the outer office." He cries hoarsely, "Here! Here! What are we doing?" Then, says the author, "there is silence. He takes out his handkerchief and mops the sweat from his face. Going back blindly to his table, he sits down and stares blankly at his lunch. . . . The curtain falls." At the close of Act II, the trial of Falder results in his sentence to penal servitude for three years. But the act does not end here. The Judge suggests to the reporters present that they should not mention the name of the woman in the case, the woman who loves the condemned man beyond her life and who stands there stunned, looking after him as he is taken away again. The reporters nod their acquiescence. The Judge speaks to the woman, saying, "Do you understand, your name will not be mentioned?" Cokeson pulls at her sleeve and tells her, "The Judge is speaking to you." But she only looks blankly at the bench, and turns away. Here the bustle of the court is resumed. The Judge calls the next case; and John Booley, of whom the audience never heard before and never will hear again, is brought to the bar of justice as the curtain falls. There are four acts to this powerful play; and the remaining two that I will not describe here, have endings that are just as forceful.

But how ever the emotional part is handled, the skillful close of the well-written act always has that cumulative effect. Almost anything that suggests finality is resorted to as a sort of cue to the audience that the curtain is coming down—

that they won't feel it as an interruption. Thus, in the old days—and in the not-so-old days—it was the custom to end the act with a rhymed couplet. The completed rhyme in itself said, "finish." It occurs in Shakespeare's works along with those of the others—not always, but commonly. For a random instance, the First Murderer rounds out the second act of "King Richard III" by saying,

And when I have my meed, I will away;
For this will out, and then I must not stay.

Certainly this doggerel is not worthy of the bard; and neither was its poor technical service. On the other hand, there is excellent reason to believe that the theater of Shakespeare had no front curtain, a lack that required extraordinary measures, one other being the necessity of carrying off all the corpses left upon the stage at the close of a tragedy. The old-fashioned couplet is also frequently to be found used as the last speech of any actor upon the stage, irrespective of its position in the play.

Another pretty little device long since demised (heaven be praised!) is what a generation ago was called a "picture." This meant that at the end of the act the players would suddenly freeze themselves, so to speak, in a tableau, or "living picture," epitomizing the action up to that point. The best example is a burlesque of it in Sheridan's "The Critic," although in that case, it occurs not at the end but in course of an act. The stage direction reads: "The two nieces draw their daggers to strike Whiskerandos. The two uncles at the instant with their two swords drawn, catch their two nieces' arms, and turn the points of their swords to Whiskerandos, who immediately draws two daggers, and holds them to the two nieces' bosoms." Thereupon Puff, the author, exclaims to his friends: "There's situation for you! There's an heroic group! You see I have them all at a deadlock. The ladies can't stab Whiskerandos. He durst not strike them for fear of their uncles. The uncles durst not kill him because of their nieces—and every one of them is afraid to let go first."

The speeches that are used as cues for the curtain are known

to the theater as "curtain lines;" but for the line that brings down the final curtain there is an especial name. It is called the "tag." In the elaborate system of stage superstitions, it is considered ill luck for an actor to utter the tag before the play's first actual performance. Tags are not remarkably different in technical characteristics from curtain lines for other acts. In the old plays they were often rendered as morals, uttered sometimes by the entire cast of characters, lined up at the footlights, and speaking in chorus.

A "wow" seems to be nothing more than a "surprise finish"—a totally unexpected turn of events that brings the act or the whole play to a close amidst thunders of applause. One of the best examples I know of I saw in an old Mack Sennett motion picture. It was another burlesque. The hero, exasperated because he cannot find where the smirking villain has hid the maiden fair, deals him an uppercut so tremendous that it carries the villain backward through a brick wall, which, broken down, reveals the pretty lady incarcerated beyond, and the long-sought "papers" into the bargain. To make the record complete for dictionary-makers, "wow" is also the term applied at this writing, to any theatrical offering that used to be called a "hit."

VARIETY

WHEN the whole play is seen assembled in the first draft, one of the most noticeable defects is a lack of variety in the scenes. Perhaps the same number of characters appear in each, lending a kind of monotony that way; perhaps they repeat themselves here and there, really presenting identical facts although with different characters; possibly there are too many scenes in a row with the same kind of emotion. In fact, the emotional continuity can now be studied and corrected for the first time.

There should be a constant variety for the eye and the ear. There should be change in everything, because in change lies interest with all that that implies. There must never be too much harping on one string. The very flow of the continuity must not be too even—and here we have that precious prin-

ciple that is called tempo. Consider your knowledge of music for this. In a play I cannot say arbitrarily which scenes should be rapid and which slow, for that depends altogether upon the material and the purpose; but the dramatist should have no difficulty in realizing that speed has much to do with human response to emotional stimulus. Probably no dramatist who ever lived was more sensitive to tempo than W. S. Gilbert. Yet I have seen beautifully done productions of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas that left their audiences half cold because they were played at one dead level. The snap, the *verve*, was gone. Playing it all at snap would not help matters. When all is snap, that is another kind of dead level in which no one snap stands out above another. There has to be an alternation; and even that must vary.

In structure, too, there must be an arrangement of tight and loose. The audience cannot stand the strain of a structure that is too compact. With more freedom in the parts, the appeal will gain, at times. Here again the dramatist must be left to his own resources, as he must be also in pruning scenes that his enthusiasm of writing has permitted to run too long. Scenes must not be disproportionate. The mere connective scene is not entitled to the stage time of a plot scene. And so on.

The drama as a whole must be trimmed to a fitting length. Custom has that at two hours and five minutes without intermissions—and the author determines this by reading the 'script beside a timepiece. If the story has any body to it at all, the 'script almost certainly will be over-written. Some theater folk will say at once that this is an advantage because at rehearsal it is so much easier to cut than to add. I would rather see it cut now. If the extra material is actually on paper it may be preserved and put back again; and in the meantime the author has made the play the way he personally wants to see it done, and not according to the whims of some one who may not make as sympathetic a choice.

So, by trimming and shaping, the play at last really begins to live for itself. Its emotional thread becomes clear and strong; and as delicate adjustments are made, its vigor increases. More is made of the possibilities latent in the scenes.

Everything is developed and broadened. These are the normal matters of revision in the first draft. Checking the things that should have been done and are now found undone, is a less happy task.

THINGS FORGOTTEN

YET, how much Edward Knoblock would have gained had he performed that less agreeable duty at this stage for his unwept comedy, "The Faun." Knoblock, who always has been remarkable for his ingenious play ideas, here subjected a situation that was badly snarled in terms of our complex social system of to-day, to the naïve common sense and brutal directness of a being so close to nature that it is unable to recognize any conventions whatever. Specifically, the statue of a satyr in the garden of a fine old English estate, comes to life to investigate the circumstances of the young lord who is present master of the place, and discovers that the young man, having lost his entire fortune gambling at the races, has permitted the ambitious mother of a girl he doesn't love to pay his debts and is therefore bound to marry that girl instead of the idol of his heart. The satyr proceeds to rectify matters in his own way, which is principally to flout the ambitious mother and her daughter, to destroy the mortgage on the family portraits held by an old money-lender, and to bring the lovers together. In a conception of this kind, rude events are a part of the story; but it was the author's mistake to let them go much beyond the faun to whose nature rudeness belonged. By making the young lord willing to accept the cancellation of his debts on such essentially dishonest terms, and the more attractive girl to approve of the faun's act in tearing up the legitimately acquired mortgage, Knoblock effectually ruined sympathy for the couple. As willing partners to dishonest acts no audience would applaud them. Thus it came about that one more fine, stimulating idea crashed.

There are times when a dramatist deliberately kills sympathy for a character. But that is when he wants to remove him from the story without the audience regretting his departure. In stage murder mysteries it is usually observable

that the character who is to be "bumped off" (if the crime has not already been committed when the play opens) is made contemptible or otherwise unsympathetic. The method is an old one. Æschylus, in his "Agamemnon," very painstakingly killed sympathy for his hero that the audience might be reconciled with his doom.⁸ But of course, in "The Faun," Knoblock certainly did not make this fatal move with sure intent.

My memory of "The Faun," produced in New York somewhere around 1910, I suppose, was refreshed about fifteen years later by an exceedingly bad movie adaptation brought to the screen under the title, "The Marriage Maker." The celebrated director, who is better left unnamed, succeeded in making the chief defects considerably worse, missing no opportunity to make the young lord even more of a bounder. If we were to go to the screen, however, for illustrations of inept technique, the supply would prove well-nigh inexhaustible.

It will be observed that I have considered the broad subject of revision one phase at a time. The dramatist will find it expedient to follow suit. He is like the spectator. The spectator cannot think concentratedly of more than one thing at a time, not because he is a spectator but because he is a human being. The dramatist, also being a human being, is subject to the same limitation. Consequently, the playwright finds it most helpful at this stage, to go through his entire play with first one requirement in mind, and then again through with another, and then another and so on.

George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly, who collaborated on a number of successful plays, have attributed a good part of their success to this practice as applied to their characters. At the time of revision they would assume the point of view of a single character and consider every scene in the play from that standpoint. Doing this with each character separately, they proved the consistency of every individual; and

⁸ See Flickinger, "The Greek Theatre and Its Drama," p. 276. This fine book, apart from being an exhaustive treatise, has the rare merit among learned works of proving its author's clear, penetrating knowledge of dramatic method. Chicago, 1913.

when they had made the tour with the whole *dramatis personæ* they had also proved the authenticity of the scenes. But the method applies not only to characters. It works, as many a dramatist has discovered down the ages, with every line of interest.



CHAPTER XXXVII

THE THEATER

IT is true and conceivable that good plays have been written with no more knowledge of the theater than may be gained from the audience side of the footlights. As to the desirability of this there are authoritative opinions pro and con; but I prefer to maintain a strict neutrality on the point because circumstances here certainly alter cases. If I had a preference I think it would be in favor of knowing the theater, and the more intimately the better, just as it seems to me that a musician might be greatly benefited by knowing in advance of his recital something about the instrument he is to play. But if the intending playwright feels that he is too weak to withstand the baleful influence upon his talent of the false world of paint and canvas, by all means let him keep away from it until his judgment matures.

THE ACTING ROUTE

FOR the novice to begin knowing the theater intimately probably would mean starting as an actor. Other playhouse duties are mostly connected with the business end; and while these are exceedingly valuable, too, they do not so speedily uncover the accepted technique of the stage. To ask pointedly if it is advantageous for a dramatist to be an actor leads in all fairness to the answer that it unquestionably would. But there again arises the question of whether or not it is the shortest road to success. Most of the great playwrights have been actors—Æschylus, Euripides, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Molière, Boucicault, and many more. On the other hand, Sophocles was not (in his later maturity at least)

desisting from the usual practice because of a weak voice; Sheridan was not; Goldsmith was not; Ibsen was not; Lessing was not; Goethe was not. If the aspiring playwright is by nature strong enough to learn the resources of the theater at close range, without forgetting that there is a—I will not say a truer but a broader—world outside, he will learn exceedingly valuable lessons.

Many an intending playwright enters the acting profession in order to earn a livelihood at the same time that he is learning; but he should be cautioned with all due sympathy and understanding, that acting is a difficult and exacting art, not generally to be treated as a mere stepping-stone to something else. The great difficulty with actor-playwrights as a rule, is that they do not see their dramas as a whole. They excel at characterizations and diverting scenes because they know full well the possibilities of the present moment; but they frequently miss, through over-elaboration of rôle and incident, the great cumulative effectiveness of a well-made, compact design in which the sum actually is greater than the parts.

If it is true that a good play may be written without especial knowledge of the theater, it is even more true that actors may perform efficiently without knowledge of playwriting. A person who has written a play without knowing something of backstage procedure, will, when he eventually comes to his acquaintance, be shocked to find that the people in this new world do not commonly talk about unities, proposition, and the rest of that scholar's lingo that even this book necessarily includes. He will be dismayed to find that most of them won't know what he is talking about; and it may even be that they will hold such references against him. In which circumstances it will avail him nothing to try to explain. But however these folk receive him, let him make no mistake about their intelligence.

They may not use or recognize the terms unity, proposition, and so forth, or even how to obtain them; but they do recognize the virtues there represented when those are contained in the finished play. I say let the newcomer hold his peace if they treat his views with disrespect, for such irreverence

implies that they have not found in his work the proof of his claims. Moreover, let him not forget that he can learn much about his own profession from every one there employed, from the stage doorman on up, as long as he accords them due respect—and keeps his own counsel.

TAKING THE THEATER AS IT IS

THE theater, good, bad, or indifferent, is an existing institution. The facts of its machinery are undeniably there. Surveying it broadly, George Pierce Baker very sagely says, "If the stage of the moment forbids in any way the just representation of life, so much the worse for that stage; it must yield."¹ But although of course it will yield, it will offer vigorous resistance and there will be a corresponding lapse of time. If the new playwright can afford to fight and to wait, all well and good. If he cannot—if he feels that he as yet has no authority with which to challenge the standing order—he will generally be wiser to accept and to meet the present requirements of the theater, instead of holding out against them. This does not mean that he will have to sell his soul. After all, the theater is not the expression but the instrument of expression; and as important as it is, it is not to be given undue importance. Shakespeare had few of our modern stage facilities, and among other handicaps, had disdainful dandies of his audience seated actually upon the stage within reaching distance of his players. The great Molière suffered likewise—perhaps more so. Yet, even these difficult conditions served to give the world masterpieces of the first order.

If there seems to be here a suggestion that the theater of to-day is a defective instrument which the dramatist must tolerate, I hasten to correct the thought. The modern playhouse has its drawbacks, but by and large, it is the most flexible physical instrument that ever, in all history, has been provided for use by the dramatic artist. Most significant of all, in the theaters of to-day the audience can see better and hear better than ever before. These are matters of scientific

¹ "Dramatic Technique," p. 15.

fact.² As a point of common sense, therefore, it does not seem reasonable for a novice at playwriting to demand that a theater shall create itself anew. I have no doubt that if he will study the instrument as it is, he will find it possible to render effectively upon it without radical change, his most inspired message.³

PRACTICAL COMPROMISES

VIRTUALLY all things are possible in this existing theater, but only a limited number are practicable—and practicableness varies with theater and play. When we talk of practicability we mean the accommodation of means to the end, and to a reasonable extent, also the adaptation of end to means. This last assertion never will be granted by the incorrigible idealist. He will never modify his play to fit his theater. He would rather be stood up against a wall and shot—and never write another play where he would be freer to express his soul.

John Jay Chapman, poet, thus scorned the shackles of the modern playhouse when he subjected the story of Benedict Arnold, conceived as a tragic hero in a Colonial uniform, to the greater conventions of the ancient Greek theater, with an Athenian chorus in flowing classical garments playing conscience to him. In this choice Mr. Chapman succeeded in being different but was not, I suppose, admirable. He made the usual mistake of theater insurgents in assuming the technique of the modern playhouse to be incapable of expressing profound emotion. In my opinion he made the further mistake of not even writing a good Greek play, the ancient Greeks being in reality, in the light of their times, excellent playwrights. This defect, however, is natu-

² See "The Theatre's Debt to America" in *The New York Times*, Dramatic Section, Sunday, December 2, 1917.

³ There are many fine plays, of course, that suffer from well-intended but only partially effective production. On this point Barrett H. Clark had a difference of opinion with the editors of Gordon Craig's magazine *The Mask*, Clark taking the stand that certain plays "are too great or too delicate for stage performance, and that the problems involving their proper production were as yet unsolved," and *The Mask* maintaining that, "a practical stage director can always be relied upon to find a way." See Clark's "A Study of the Modern Drama," p. 168.

ral, for if Mr. Chapman had understood the practical character of the Greek stage, he would necessarily also have perceived the still more practical advantages of the physical theater of to-day. In his refusal to submit the end to the means, Mr. Chapman hid from others the tragic grandeur that he himself probably envisioned, replacing the tried and true principles of dramatic effectiveness with a form of art that was "neither fish, fowl, nor good red herring."⁴ On the other hand, a discerning dramatist like John Galsworthy not only selects the fitting facilities of the theater to attain a given end, but also is careful to choose an end that will have its best expression in the theater rather than through some other art form like music, painting, or literature of the printed page.

It is not my present purpose to list all the facilities of the theater as an instrument; it is merely to call attention to those major considerations that playwrights should bear in mind in all circumstances of production. The first strictly playhouse obligation is perhaps to provide subject matter important enough to justify the gathering of a capacity audience to witness it. The second possibly is to keep the play within limits that will permit spectators to eat dinner and dress and enable them afterward to catch commuters' trains that will land them at home by about midnight. The third is to provide a continuity that may be realized and maintained by the normal machinery of the theater. It is this third aspect that is the especial concern of this chapter.

PROVISIONS FOR SCENE-SHIFTING

IN COMPRESSING natural events within the limits of time and space dictated by ordinary theater conditions—the progress of a lifetime frequently being crowded into the usual two hours and five minutes—the theater is heavily taxed at times to bear up under the burden. When the dramatist can ease that burden without sacrificing his play, he is assuring his work a smoother production.

⁴"Benedict Arnold: A Play for a Greek Theatre," by John Jay Chapman, has been published and was actually performed some years ago in an open-air theater on a millionaire's estate along the Hudson River.

There is no more convenient or striking illustration of this than may be found in meeting ordinary scenic requirements—especially in a play wherein rapid changes of setting are required during the act. In such dramas, it is observable that a full-stage scene, with elaborate investiture, not immediately succeeded by an intermission, is almost invariably followed by a shallow setting.

This device is especially common in vaudeville, the musical revue and the spectacular melodrama. Although the change is made in the twinkling of an eye, time is needed somewhere to prepare or to clear the stage. The shallow setting screens that necessary labor; and after its action has elapsed, the stage is probably ready to shift to another big scene occupying the full space. Effort is usually made to have the heaviest work of the stage crew at intermissions when there is time for it and when the audience will not mind hearing an occasional hammer-blow, rumble, or crash of some weighty piece falling into place. But where changes must occur within the act, the author will favor all concerned by trying to think of his sets as alternately "full-stage" and "in one"—or not much deeper than "in one."

"Full-stage" is a self-explanatory term; "in one" means just to include the first entrances at either side. The expression is convenient, although its precise connotation is lost. It refers to a now obsolete system by which scenery was moved into view on a succession of grooves numbered from the footlights to the back wall, with what were known as Right or Left First Entrance, Second Entrance, Third Entrance and so forth to Right or Left Upper Entrance, intervening. The set "in one" really is a little cramped for comfort, as may be observed in vaudeville houses when the "patter" or "sidewalk comedians" do their turn in front of that familiar curtain that bears the advertising of the local merchants. Further encroachment toward the rear would seriously hamper work that is required there.

There are in existence revolving, sliding and wagon stages that meet scene-shifting problems with more or less ingenuity;⁵ but they probably do not form the regular equip-

⁵ See the present author's "Play Production in America," New York, 1916.

ment of as many theaters in the whole world as one could count on his fingers. Indeed, in America at least, even those stages so outfitted do not make much use of these exceptional devices. The novice at playwriting had better not expect them, particularly when even established dramatists work to obviate conditions needing such equipment.

Real estate on good theater sites is generally too valuable to waste on stage space that is not steadily used. A few metropolitan theaters have peculiarities of construction of which scenic artists avail themselves in special productions; but as soon as those productions take to the road, the scenery is standardized along certain general lines that there may be no difficulty on that score as the tour proceeds. The Lyceum Theater, in New York, has a special depth to one part of its stage that was used with great effect for a disappearing street in "The Dawn of a To-morrow;" but only the New York audiences thrilled to that special marvel, for on tour it had to be modified.



Courtesy of Kenneth Macgowan

SETTINGS FOR "DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS"

Sketches provided by Eugene O'Neill in his manuscript of this play, and followed closely by Robert Edmond Jones who not only designed the final settings but also directed the production. The successive drawings indicate how the inside rooms are to be revealed to the spectators.

In writing his drama the author will do well to draw at least a diagram for his own information, indicating doors, windows, and other leading features of each set as he sees it. It will help him to visualize his action, to avoid certain blunders in positions of his characters, and to prevent unreasonable demands upon normal stage equipment. This diagram need not be incorporated in his finished manuscript; but a clear description of it should be. For example, see the detailed accounts of settings in a Pinero play, or an Ibsen play, or a Galsworthy play. Such a word picture should include all furnishings that are necessary to the action; and to make sure of that, it is useful, when the play is finished roughly, to go through the text, noting the properties required on set when the curtain rises on each act or at the start of each new setting within the act.

It is a remarkable and happy circumstance that realistic plays, in which the study of character is the chief attraction—and I cite here the plays of John Galsworthy as admirable examples—generally *demand* circumscription of space. They also commonly call for but few characters. That is, the same play that is probably limited in appeal because of its higher intellectual plane,⁶ usually is also a cheaper play to produce than the more robustious action story. The notable exceptions to this among modern plays, are examples of so-called "Expressionism"—"Peer Gynt," "The Blue Bird," "The Betrothal," "The Poor Little Rich Girl," "Beggars On Horseback," "The Adding-Machine," "Liliom," "Processional," and it wouldn't be difficult to justify the inclusion of stage versions of "Alice in Wonderland." In accordance with the expressionist view, the stage itself embodies, in various imaginative forms, not the literal story but the mental states of the story. In the literal treatment, psychological plays necessarily minimize physical action; in the expressionist treatment, the psychological processes are shown in all their activity and with consequent extravagance of movement, props and scenery. I may add that this practice is by no means new to the theater. It was done frequently in the old morality plays of the Middle Ages just as it was done

⁶ See the discussion of this point in Chapter XLI, "What the Public Wants."

in another medium by John Bunyan in "Pilgrim's Progress." The newness of it is only in the unprecedented extent of the practice, probably due in the main not to the genuine artistic possibilities of the method as demonstrated in the interesting plays named, but to simple faddishness, encouraged by the equally unprecedented facilities of the modern stage that make such whimsies easily possible.

To return, however, to the fact that most intensive character studies of necessity do not require many changes of scene, it is interesting to read an interview given by Hermann Sudermann in 1923 to Barrett H. Clark, who quotes it thus, in his "Study of the Modern Drama" (p. 87): "'When I wrote my early plays,' he said, 'it was for the simple stationary stage. We had no revolving stages then,⁷ and to change a scene meant time, trouble and expense. It was our problem how often *not* to change the set during a play, and to that I attribute whatever virtue of unity my plays may possess. It is easy to write a play in twenty scenes, the way the youngsters do nowadays, but the effect is not happy. When I wrote "Honor" and the play you call "Magda,"⁸ I had to get down to work and keep my plot from scattering. And I believe our plays were on the whole better than the plays that are being written now. Indeed, if I were beginning all over again, I am quite sure I should not take advantage of the new scenic devices: I should write my plays as nearly as possible as I wrote them in the late eighties and early nineties.'"

BALANCING PLAY AND PROBABLE INCOME

IN THIS same matter of scenery the dramatist should discriminate between a delicate, subtle play and a naturally spectacular subject. The subtle play cannot be expected to be as universal in appeal as some robust melodrama; and with its smaller audience and consequently smaller box-office re-

⁷ To be exact, while Sudermann had not encountered revolving stages and the other mechanical features that are now generally familiar, they actually existed. A revolving stage was used in Paris in 1880 for a production of "La Crime de Faverne" in which Frédéric Lemaître appeared, and had been known in Japan for many years before that.

⁸ "Heimat."

turn, cannot justify a lot of expensive scenery. The heavier the production, in other words, the more the public must pay to see it; and as ticket prices are substantially the same whether a play is expensive or cheap to produce, the only way out is to attract patrons to a corresponding degree with a play that will appeal to them. If the offering does not appeal to many it cannot afford luxuries that only many would pay for. That surely is a common-sense conclusion.

Making time for scene changes suggests making time for players to change their costumes. In the effort to obtain variety in all parts of a drama, the trained writer for the stage endeavors also to relieve and refresh the spectator's eye by motivating changes of dress for the characters. Morning, evening, and afternoon clothes are the obvious differences. Others soon suggest themselves. But when the scheme of the play calls upon an actor or actress to make a head-to-foot change while the curtain touches the stage and at once goes up again, or while another character utters two lines of dialogue, the feat is either impossible or requires special genius. Let the author guard against this.

The caution not to demand too many settings also suggests another matter, which is not to employ too many actors. Every additional character means an extra actor on the pay-roll, or, in all events, extra pay for the actor who "doubles" in the part. There are reasons why it is valuable to have certain rôles in a play, especially for stock and amateur performances, both of which mean additional income to be derived after a play has had regular stage production; but the prime consideration now is to have the production. I say at this point, therefore, that there should not be any characters put into the play without legitimate structural reasons. Such figures may not cause the play's failure, but they will upset values that would quite certainly be more effective without them.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

IT OUGHT to be obvious that, when a writer knows nothing about a stage, he cannot give expert instructions as to how a stage should be run. Nevertheless, there are those who main-

tain that he can. They say that in reproducing life he need not scruple about demanding in his manuscript its equivalent in the theater, the instructions having the same pertinence in both places. This, of course, is not wholly true. There are technical directions, too. Technical directions take cognizance of technical needs and technical needs call for trained, specialized attention. But even these are deprecated—on the ground that the classic dramatists, from Æschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles to Shakespeare and Molière, used none. This argument also is not sound. W. G. Rutherford, in "A Chapter on the History of Annotation," presumes, from evidence in manuscripts of the first two mentioned, that stage directions were included in these from the dramatists' own hands; and there are masses of traditional business and stage arrangements for the plays of Shakespeare and Molière, that very possibly descended from their own productions, although they do not often accompany the printed texts.

There are certain very special stage directions that will be inserted in any manuscript when it reaches the period of rehearsal and becomes known as a "prompt copy." These are good things to know about, but not vital to the writing of good plays; so it is not my purpose to describe them. The author should inform the producer and the players just of what is necessary to their understanding of the text, without insulting their intelligence. To indicate every tiny shade of intonation and degree of movement is unwise. To anticipate the rehearsal period too far is folly. No author's mere fancy can prejudge action as successfully as it may be weighed by a good director at rehearsal with all the elements actually before him.⁹ I say this bearing in mind the practice of Pinero, who prints his plays as rapidly as he completes them in his study, and insists that they be followed to the letter. Pinero, however, has a rare understanding of theater requirements. With poor direction he is thus admirably protected; but with good direction, his insistence very probably is a handicap.

The author's stage directions are not properly so much matters of "upstage" and "downstage" and "crossings" and

⁹ There is some excellent advice on this and other phases of stage directions in Clark's "Study of the Modern Drama," p. 255ff., and p. 313f.

the rest of the technical palaver that so fascinates the tyro when he first hears it, as they are plain statements of fact readily to be understood even by all persons uninitiated in the world behind the scenes. If the author has decided that the bookcase is to stand at the rear of the setting he doesn't have to write that the actor who approaches it "goes upstage." He just says the simple, sensible thing, that he "goes to the bookcase." The normal direction will be just as clear to the actor as the other would be. In fact, this simpler method has obtained such force in late years that much of the old technical twaddle has completely vanished, and more is undoubtedly on the way.

To know when to be and when not to be technical in stage directions—to know, indeed, when to use stage directions at all—is just to strike that happy compromise that evidences good personal judgment. That, in turn, again partakes of the background of philosophy that must belong to the dramatist himself, and that, once more, this book cannot hope to supply.

Edmund Gosse, in his "Henrik Ibsen" (p. 241 f.), reminds his readers that the force of a play is not in its dialogue alone, and goes on to comment upon Ibsen's "minute care in the copiousness of his stage directions." He says: "In 1899 Ibsen remarked to me that it was almost useless for actors nowadays to try to perform the comedies of Holberg, because there were no stage directions and the tradition was lost. Of his own work, fortunately, that can never be said."

THE MANUSCRIPT

THERE is also the matter of the physical appearance of the manuscript. We may dispose of this very quickly by referring to the accompanying illustration which shows in a single page most of the details of arrangement. The size in actual life is that of the ordinary commercial sheet, $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ inches. It is written upon one side only, and the matter it holds is supposed to equal approximately one minute of acting time. It was formerly the custom to underscore all the "business" in red; but simple indentation so clearly marks off

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ACT THREE

SETTING:

A bedroom in MRS. GORLIK'S boarding house in East 33rd St. There is an entrance door at the left, a closet at the right. Near the closet an open window reveals a moonlit night and a fire-escape. There are a couple of ancient chairs, a dresser and an iron bed. The paper on the wall has been there--well, as long as the carpet on the floor.

AT RISE:

Three weeks later. The stage is altogether dark save for the light outside the window. A breeze blows the curtains gently. There is a knock at the door.

MRS. GORLIK

(Outside)

Are you in yet, miss?

(She enters, switches on the lights and goes across to closet the window, muttering.)

Never knew a girl wasn't a born fool. Leaves her window up with all these robberies--gets all my curtains dirty--

(She inspects a pair of stockings drying on a towel rack.)
T'ain't decent!

(A door bell rings below.)

MRS. GORLIK

(She looks at the second pair.)

Another pair.

A VOICE

(From the basement.)

Mrs. Gorlik!

MRS. GORLIK

What do you want?

VOICE

(From basement.)

Man on his way up to see Miss Halevy.

MRS. GORLIK

What?

VOICE

Man here to see Miss Halevy.

Courtesy of the Author

TYPED PAGE FROM "SATURDAY'S CHILDREN" BY
MAXWELL ANDERSON

Showing the customary form of a submitted play manuscript. Matter on each page is reckoned roughly as one acting minute. Character names in the middle make the individuality of the speeches more marked than when typed at left as they sometimes are, and as is illustrated elsewhere on a page from "The Green Goddess." The "business" is so clearly differentiated from the dialogue by its indentation that the old practice of underscoring it in red is rapidly dying out.

the business from the speeches that it is now only occasionally underscored at all. Some managers, Winthrop Ames particularly, prefer to put the names of the characters at the left-hand side. This is the English form. The usual American practice, founded on French originals, is as shown. Some authors double and triple-space their texts on the allegation that single-spaced matter is difficult to read. I do not think this is true where speeches are as short as they usually are in a professional 'script. During my professional playreading days I carefully studied all of the practicable forms submitted; and the present illustration combines, in my opinion, their best features.

Pages should be numbered consecutively, I believe, throughout. As I see it, the occasional practice of numbering each act separately, beginning with 1, really hasn't much to commend it. Neither has the scheme of binding the acts separately, until such time as the play goes into rehearsal. Binding should be some tough, flexible material, riveted on with the same fasteners that hold the pages together. There should be at least four of these fasteners down the left-hand margin to prevent the pages from buckling when opened. This, of course, is unless some one of the variety of patent fasteners and covers available in the market, is used. The cover should bear the name of the play, the number of acts and the name and address of the author. These items should be repeated on an inside title-page. There should also be at least one more prefatory page giving the additional matter usually shown in the theater program—characters, settings, time and place. As to number of copies, an original and two carbons—the second of these to be kept religiously by the author as a file copy—are usually sufficient for all purposes at this stage.



CHAPTER XXXVIII

TITLE AND KIND

THE play should have a title. Yet, plays have been produced without titles often enough for the practice not to be unique, while changing titles between when the play is on the road, in the tryout period, and the date of the metropolitan "première" is exceedingly common. From time to time the difficulty of naming a play is capitalized by offering the public a prize for suggesting a title; but I do not recall ever having heard of a winner that was satisfactory to all concerned. November 1, 1915, the New York newspapers published the announcement of a new play to be opened a week later at the Longacre Theater in this fashion: "Cohan & Harris will present Leo Ditrichstein and Fred and Fanny Hatton"—meaning that the producers had despaired of finding a good name for a comedy that on the road had already been called "Jean Paurel" and "\$2,000 a Night." This unconventionally introduced play subsequently was called "The Great Lover."

HIT-OR-MISS

THERE are so many freak problems in dubbing an attraction that it is not to be wondered that some gambling souls do their christening by "systems." Henri Bernstein, the eminent French dramatist, had a persistent regard for titles with six letters—"Joujou," "Samson," "Israel," "Voleur," "Secret," "Detour," and others. He broke away from this scheme in the spring of 1926 with a drama entitled, "The Gallery of Mirrors," but I do not recall that it was a success. I know a play-broker in New York who pins her greatest faith to plays named with thirteen letters. She has made

more money out of that sort than any other. In another direction it has frequently been remarked that W. S. Gilbert had a superstitious partiality for titles beginning with the letter "P"—"Palace of Truth," "Pygmalion and Galatea," "Pinafore," "Patience," "Pirates of Penzance," "Princess Ida," and "Peer and the Peri" which was the original title of "Iolanthe." Of course, Gilbert and Sullivan produced works under names that would not fit this view; but the collection is striking enough.

Bayard Veiller's title experiences have been as varied as any one's. His celebrated melodrama, "Within the Law," was called, in its early stages, "The Miracle" and "The Case of Mary Turner." Before his mystery drama, "The Thirteenth Chair," had found that designation, it was dangerously close to opening time, within about seven days of the first performance. The fact that thirteen titles were in the rejected list suggested to him the anticipatory sales value of "thirteen" in the title; and in trying to justify its use he hit on the expedient in one of his best scenes, of having thirteen at table where only twelve had sat before.¹

TITLES IN PIGEONHOLES

IN MOST essays on titles it is noted that many dramatists name their plays after their chief characters as, "Hamlet," "Disraeli," "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines," "Rutherford and Son," "Douglas," "Potash and Perlmutter," "Davy Crockett," "The Village Postmaster," "The Dunce-Boy," "The Auctioneer," "The Builder of Bridges," and so endlessly on; that others use names of places: "Arizona," "Alabama," "Peaceful Valley," "Shore Acres," "The Old Homestead," "Dixie," "The Promised Land," "The Lights of London;" that another group combines the two: "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," "The Toymaker of Nuremburg," "The Prince of Pilsen," "The Prince of India," "The Butcher of First Avenue;" that certain others prefer tying together the central character and the situation either directly or by im-

¹ An interesting account of similar changes for many well-known plays is in the dramatic section of *The New York Times* of Sunday, February 25, 1917, under the heading, "The Quest of the Golden Title."

plication: "The Return of Peter Grimm," "The Man Who Stood Still," "Alice-Sit-By-the-Fire," "The Laughing Husband," "The Convict's Sweetheart;" that some take their titles from properties prominent in the action: "Lady Windermere's Fan," "A Scrap of Paper," "A Glass of Water," "A Pair of Spectacles," "The Yellow Ticket." So the titles are grouped with many more divisions and subdivisions than I have named.

But the magic lies not there. The examples are but symptoms of states of mind on the part of dramatists who are trying to consider their specific plays and their specific publics. Without taking those into account, the grouping and the ticketing might go on forever, without giving the student anything really helpful. This playwright knows that his theme is trite, but that his treatment of it is fresh and new. He seeks therefore to express the treatment. His neighbor has a drama in which the treatment is commonplace but the story is exciting. Is there question of his choice? A third dramatist knows that all else in his drama is overshadowed by the grandeur of his central character. Would he be wise to imitate the selection of either of the other two? He cuts his garment according to his cloth.

AD CAPTANDUM APPEAL

THE dramatist has first of all to remember that when the public originally reads or hears a title it probably knows nothing of the play's content. If the name is to interest people, it must have in itself and irrespective of the play, an *ad captandum*, "catchy" quality. In this connection so very much depends upon the public's state of mind at the moment, that what is catchy at one time will be humdrum and forbidding at another. The spectator then says to himself, "I'm fed-up with that," or, "I'll die if I see another play on that subject"—and won't take the trouble to find the truth of the matter. A few years ago there was an offering called "Miss Mah Jong." At that time everybody doted on the alleged Chinese game referred to; but now how few there are who can recall the "Flowers," the "Seasons," the "Bamboos," and the rest of it. In 1915 there also was in New

York or vicinity a piece called "September Morn," deriving its title significance from a very lovely painting of a nude that some strange combination of events had made notorious as an alleged "naughty" picture. It filled public consciousness; but having filled it, it's now gone and forgotten.

All possible ideas that the title may suggest to the public should be considered. The news, the human interest, the sensationalism, the general attractiveness of it, should be judged in the light of the prevailing temper of the people. Some of these qualities are easy to determine; others may be gauged only after prolonged deliberation. The consideration is not so much what people are invited to attend as what they have in their mental state *to attend with*. The public knows readily enough the probable type of subject matter of a drama entitled "Napoleon;" but whether that will attract them or repel them depends on how they regard the Little Corporal, whether they like him or dislike him, whether they anticipate scandalous disclosures or feel in any way an urge to acquire further knowledge. Robert Sherwood's comedy "The Queen's Husband" certainly derived an extra fillip of attention because of the rumor that it was based on domestic affairs of Queen Marie of Roumania, but only because Queen Marie within the year had made a sensational tour of the United States. "The Royal Family," by George Kaufman and Edna Ferber, also profited from an allegation—denied by the authors, however—that their capital satire was a "take-off" on the private life of the beloved Drews and Barrymores.

One very common way of tying in with what is in the public mind is to name the play with at least part of some catch-phrase that happens at the moment to be on everybody's tongue. "Very Good, Eddie," "Lady, Be Good," "Little But Oh My," "The Cat's Pajamas," "Let George Do It," "The Wooden Kimono" are all examples from within the last decade. Dramatists unwilling to risk the inspiration of fads of speech that may go as suddenly as they came, utilize popular proverbs that will always be with us. Hence we get such titles as these: "As Ye Sow," "Birds of a Feather," "Business is Business," "The Moth and the Flame," "The Grain of Dust," "Rolling Stones," "Sauce For the Goose," and

"There's Many a Slip." Thinking in similes and metaphors requires care, however. I recall that the title of one unproduced play that came to my attention was "The Uneasy Crown," the author not stopping to realize that the uneasy part of the old saw is not the crown but the head.

Proverbs are not by any means our only common expressions; so it is natural that some playwrights should favor the rest. "The Bondsman," "For Value Received," "The Dollar Mark," "The Dollar Princess," "Dollars and Cents" (or "Dollars and Sense," a form that recurs every few seasons), "Five Hundred and Fifty Per Cent, or Something for Nothing," and perhaps "Love Insurance" come from the business world; the law gives: "The Burden of Proof," "The Trial of Mary Dugan," "Trial By Jury," "The Witness for the Defense," "The Prosecuting Attorney," "The Third Degree," and so on. With the formula indicated, the reader may go on and on into other branches of everyday life and pick dozens of other familiar titles. That is why playwrights often pick the same titles. I wrote a play called "The Trap" and another called "The Boomerang" long before I saw other playwrights put the same titles on Broadway; but no doubt some one else used them long before I did. They are obvious.

There is naught to gain by listing the sources of such suggestions; but anything that engages the voluntary attention of a large part of the public is worth investigating from the dramatist's point of view. Where else would there be any value in the name of that famous old farce, "Are You a Mason?" Even an unarticulated idea is worth while as long as it's really in the air. That's what gave George Randolph Chester his highly successful title, "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford."

WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO SEE

TO SAY that the title should not repel people seems a matter of ordinary common sense. But just what this means is difficult to determine, for the public has been trained for so long to expect the strong contrasts that make up dramatic fare, that they frequently read play titles in reverse—pro-

vided, however, that there is more room for imagination in the reverse. "All the Comforts of Home" thus means, "All the Miseries of Home;" "Peace and Quiet" means, "Disturbance and Noise." People always jump to conclusions that promise most. Repellent ideas, therefore, are not necessarily those that are tabooed by the minister. People like to see picturesque lives outside their own that are invested with romantic glamour simply because they are unknown and forbidden. "The Racket," a really meritorious New York play of the season 1927-1928, attracted audiences for a time with an amazingly sordid, widely-exploited catchline, "The hard-boiled history of a crime." Even the sinister, horrible word "Murder" has also its fascination for morbid interest. "The Living Corpse" seems an entirely acceptable title for one of Tolstoy's plays.

The public frequently reads opposite ideas in a title—and yet it is unwise generally for the dramatist to mislead it that way. That is, he should make sure that it gets what it anticipates, or something equally diverting. It is bad business for the playwright to have in the theater to see a tragedy audiences who expected comedy. This is just common sense again. So one thing that managers usually insist on is that the comedy shall have a comedy title, the serious play a name to correspond, and so on. "The Clutching Claw" is unquestionably the mystery melodrama; "The Mountain Climber" is a comedy; "Classmates" is a drama with heart-interest, with generous admixture of laughter and tears; "The Commuters" simply must be a comedy; "The Count of Luxembourg" must be a comedy, and we won't be displeased if we find it musical as well. We may be mistaken in detail; but we never must have the sense of being tricked.

Winchell Smith, eminent not only as dramatist but as playdoctor, believes that a title can neither make nor break a play; but he attaches great importance to an apt one. Aptness unquestionably here means not so much fitting the play as tickling the public fancy. I have heard it said that a good title should imply not less than six attractive ideas. Probably setting a number is rather silly, and yet there indubitably is merit in suggesting more than one inviting thought.

"Treasure Island" certainly suggests more than "Arizona." David Belasco strongly believes in including "the woman angle;" somebody else has advised "youth" and "optimism"; some one else again, "adventure;" still another, "money" and "business." Along this line one may consult what is said in Chapter LIX on elemental themes.

Norman Lee Swartout, well-known for his extended relations with the "little theater" groups, recommends having "movement" in a title—that is, an idea of something done. I believe this to be an exceedingly sage observation, because audiences in anticipation are interested most in the action probabilities of the play—the "what-happened" and the "what-happened-then" idea. Whatever can be done to pique that interest is obviously valuable. Mr. Swartout's view is borne out in his own title "The Arrival of Kitty," which labels one of the most frequently played farces in America. In the same title class are, "Along Came Ruth," an adaptation made long ago by Holman F. Day; "What the Doctor Ordered," by A. E. Thomas; "Buntz Pulls the Strings," by Graham Moffat, and Bernard Shaw's "How He Lied to Her Husband." Also, to get into a higher realm, Oliver Goldsmith's "She Stoops to Conquer."

ACTION TITLES

THE action title quite invariably has to do with the basic situation, for that presumably contains all the worth-while interest of the play to the public. If the story is already known to the public as an exciting affair, it may be enough to call it, for instance, "The Life and Death of King John," or "Ædipus Rex," but if the public does not know it, the author is wise not to betray in his title too much of what happens. He wants just to suggest it. He can afford to betray most about the "precipitating act" which is, of course, the part of the play situation that is most provocative of interest and least satisfying. The theatergoer shouldn't be told all there is or he won't want to come. Hence we find that when an action title is most specific, it expresses the precipitating act—like, "She Stoops to Conquer." It is only a little less

specific when it tries to state the whole basic predicament—"Bought and Paid For," or, "A Butterfly on the Wheel," or, "The Trap," or, "Caught in the Rain," or, "Within the Law." When the author doubts the pulling-power of his precipitating act or of his situation as a whole, he reaches out for other, more striking forms of popular interest that his material may contain. He may feel that his theme conveys the larger interest. Accordingly he generalizes still more, and does as John van Druten did with "Diversion," or Lee Wilson Dodd with "Speed," or Henry Kitchell Webster with "June Madness." But the further they get away from the precipitating act, the less specific they can afford to be.

As opposition of ideas in the play situation evolves action, so paradox is a heavily worked device to suggest action. One thinks here of "The Good-Bad Man," "The Poor Little Rich Girl," "The Bachelor's Baby," "The Dagger and the Cross," "A Good Little Devil," and "Nobody's Widow." "Abie's Irish Rose" is a title that instantly suggests opposition without actually stating it.

When the theme does not compensate for commonplace situation by being arresting for its news value, the author strives to suggest novelty of point of view and of treatment by trick phrasing. Oscar Wilde thus calls a play, "The Importance of Being Earnest." If this is not feasible, the title-hunter aims to arouse human interest. A fragile little comedy makes a strong bid for sentimental attention with the title, "Love Watches;" and a robustious melodrama on a hackneyed theme calls itself, "A Bird in a Gilded Cage."

ODDITIES

WHEN the play is a vehicle for a star, there is not, of course, so heavy a burden of appeal for the title to carry. Stars have their followings who go to see them primarily; and they therefore can take chances with titles that would work serious harm to other producers. Walter Hampden risks a play called "Caponsacchi;" Laurence Irving was able to venture one called "The Fool Hath Said in His Heart There Is No God."

In ordinary circumstances the title should be easily spoken and pronounced and readily understood. As far as pronunciation goes, no theatergoer wants to recommend a play the title of which he's not sure of. On the other hand, it is human vanity to talk a great deal about strange names the pronunciation of which calls for exclusive knowledge. William A. Brady views this matter as clearly as any one in the theater. He once said:

I put titles on plays to sell them. If you select a name that not everybody understands and all cannot pronounce, you are placing your play under just that much of a handicap. When "Frou Frou" was played as a drama upon the speaking stage, numbers of persons called it "Frow Frow," and I do not suppose very many knew the significance of the name. But it is a sure thing that everybody of ordinary intelligence will get a suggestion from "The Hungry Heart," which carries a direct meaning in plain, homely words. It is a dangerous thing to tag a picture or a spoken play with a name in a foreign tongue or one that is not universally familiar. I recall that the late Augustin Daly produced a drama which he called "Pique"; and what the public did with that title was almost beyond belief. People called it "Pike," "Pick-wee," "Pee-kay" and almost everything that can be imagined. The subtle meaning of the word in association with the story did not occur to them at all; and Mr. Daly's drama was greatly injured in consequence.²

I remember that Triangle Film Corporation found difficulty of this sort with Willard Mack's Hawaiian motion picture, "Aloha Oë." The "horrible example" probably is "NJU," a stage production made during the brief New York partnership of Josef Urban and Richard Ordynski about 1916 or 1917. When it opened, a prominent New York attorney, a college man, cultured and alert, chanced to hear that I was acquainted with the author, Ossip Dymow, so picked me out to ask, "What is this new play—er—er—?" He hesitated; and then with a smile uttered the name as best he could, "—New-Jew?" To some minds the mere fact that he was curious about it proved the excellence of the title; but I don't think so.

² *Moving Picture World*, Feb. 24, 1917, p. 1198.

Augustin Daly may have made a mistake with "Pique," as Brady states; but he nevertheless had positive ideas about what titles should be. His chief contention in this regard was that it was a grave error to give a play a title that could be turned into a weapon against it. This view may have arisen out of his experience in producing a play called "Fortune." Most of the critics, hearing this name in advance of opening, published opinions that said, in one way or another, "We trust the play will not prove a mis-Fortune for Mr. Daly and his beautiful theater." Still, it is easy to turn almost any title into a weapon against it if a critic is so disposed and clever enough. Arthur Hammerstein provided a sumptuous and expensive production for the opening of his new theater in New York in the season of 1927-1928, and called it "The Golden Dawn." The harm done by one critic's reference to it as "The Golden Yawn" was serious only because most of the other reviewers found it to fit.

"Failures"³ was the ominous title of a piece speedily withdrawn from the Broadway district a season or two ago; but without having seen the play, I suspect that it was more than the title that killed it. Three plays of Shakespeare's called, respectively, "As You Like It," "Much Ado About Nothing," and "What You Will," have outlived damage that might have come on that score; and I doubt not that many more examples might be cited to prove the common conviction among dramatists that, "Any title is a good title for a good play and any title is a bad title for a bad play." Henry Arthur Jones is of the opinion that the extra merit that may come from a good title is useful only at the start of a production. When the play has been running awhile, he believes, any label that distinguishes it is a good one because it has by that time become current among playgoers.⁴

DECIDING THE POINT

So THE first consideration in "inventing" titles is to find what you want to say. That is the great determining factor.

³ I do not think that this was the play by the French dramatist, F. Lenormand; but it may have been.

⁴ Dramatic Section of *The New York Times*, January 28, 1912.

Once that is established, then the dramatist can worry about expressing the idea most effectively. An excellent start is to write down as matter-of-factly as may be, the ideas to be conveyed. With that done, the mind is free to cavort until a snappy title is found to fit. It's not easy and I'm not going to give samples. Good titles cannot always be made to fit, as every writer who has been in the game for any reasonable time must know.

We all encounter wonderful titles that we simply cannot throw away. We jot them down and put them carefully in the file with other notes of the same sort. But somehow the day never comes when they are useful. For a dozen years at least to my knowledge, George C. Tyler has been saving for psychological moments two titles that in his trained view are especially good. He has told them in printed interviews, so in mentioning them I violate no confidence. One is, "The City of Razzle Dazzle," which he found in an O. Henry story, and the other is, "All the King's Men," that came from the well-known fall of Humpty Dumpty. As far as I can recall, Tyler never has attached either to a play.

The remaining practical consideration of importance about titles is the matter of length. The name should not be too long to be shown effectively in incandescent lights on the theater front; and it should not try to occupy all of that front because the star's name usually has to go up with it. In event of dispute, the star's name is pretty apt to win out. The short title may be displayed in larger type on the posters, window, and car cards and in newspaper columns, and therefore read at a greater distance. Also, it may be read at a glance. This explains the wisdom of the veteran English dramatist, Louis N. Parker, when he said that an effective title is one that looks well on the buses. Any one who has been to London where buses are permitted to carry theater advertisements on the outside, will realize the force of this remark.

WHAT ELSE IS IT CALLED?

I HAVE given enough to indicate how plays may be named, but I have said nothing much about how plays may be

ticketed otherwise. What are the differences between comedy and tragedy and the other forms like melodrama, farce, tragicomedy, chronicle play, miracle play, mystery play, comedy of manners, sentimental comedy, satire, burlesque, and the rest?

A question like this inevitably suggests Shakespeare's sly dig at classification of plays in "Hamlet," wherein Polonius says, "The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene undividable or poem unlimited." The thing can be much overdone. At the same time it is likely that a detailed classification has its advantages for the critic of dramatic literature.

For the playwright, however, any complicated system of terminology is a handicap. He has enough to think about without worrying over just which scholastic pigeonhole his work will fall into. So far as he need be concerned in everyday practice, there are just four kinds of play—comedy, drama, melodrama, and farce—and he need not trouble himself greatly with even these distinctions save as they guide him to more consistent playwriting. According to this very general grouping, drama and melodrama are serious plays, while comedy and farce are humorous ones. The difference between drama and melodrama is that in the former the characters concerned work out a story apparently of their own volitions, whereas in the latter the plot arbitrarily forces its characters to act according to its needs without reference to their free will. The difference between comedy and farce is precisely the same—in one the characters dominate the plot, and in the other the plot dominates the characters. The plots of melodrama and farce compel their characters beyond the reasonable needs of human experience because, in their effort to wrack the emotions of the spectators through sheer theatrical effect, they use stories that are much exaggerated in their fundamental ideas, or that have impossibly swift successions of sensational "situations."

Melodrama and farce thus are of lower order than drama and comedy; but they are nevertheless worthy forms. A powerful melodrama like "Within the Law," or an hilarious

farce like "Seven Days," is an achievement of which any dramatist may well be proud. The old farce "Charley's Aunt" made its author, Brandon Thomas, a millionaire; and there is no doubt that the timeworn melodramas, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "East Lynne," earned handsome fortunes for themselves if they did not heavily recompense their authors.

The term "drama," as a classification, is not as distinctive a word as one would like; but it is convenient, and it actually is used this way by professional playwrights. A "drama" is essentially serious, and it may or may not be tragic in its ending. Unrelieved tragedy is so uncommon these days that the old designation "tragedy" has pretty much fallen by the way-side. In the same way many other particular labels for plays have gone to disuse save where some dramatist has revived them for fine description. On the whole, comedy, drama, melodrama and farce will be found to embrace all modern plays quite satisfactorily.

ORIGIN OF SPECIES

IN ALFRED HENNEQUIN's little book, "The Art of Playwriting," published in 1890, there occurs a long list of play varieties with definitions. First there is tragedy. This is divided into the ancient classic tragedy, the modern classic tragedy, the romantic tragedy and mediated tragedy. The last named is subdivided into the *drame* or *schauspiel* and the emotional drama. The *drame* is either the romantic *drame* or the social *drame*, which is further subdivided into the *pièce* and the melodrama. Other main classifications given are spectacular drama, musical drama, and comedy. Hennequin divides comedy into the ancient classic (including the old, the middle, and the new), the modern classic, the romantic, the comedy of manners, comedy-drama, farce-comedy, or farcical comedy, farce, burlesque, the *burletta* and the *comedieta*. In a footnote he reminds the reader that he has omitted, purposely, miracle, and mystery plays, the *commedia dell' arte* and *comedias de capa y de espada* because they are no longer seen upon the modern stage. To mention

other omissions one may add to the list, tragicomedy, the chronicle-play, tragedy of blood, dramatico-romance, lyrical-burlesque, satire, high comedy, the comedy of humours, *comédie-larmoyante*, tradesman's tragedy, *opéra-comique*, *opéra-bouffe*, vaudeville, *jeu*, masque, and so forth and so on almost endlessly. I have mentioned the prominent divisions just to show how awe-inspiring the list is—and how futile it would be for the working dramatist to burden his mind with them.

To make this answer a more complete response to the question, it may be said that chronicle play is a scholars' term to indicate a loose-jointed, narrative type founded upon history of which Shakespeare's "histories," "Richard II," "Richard III," "Henry IV," "Henry V," and "Henry VI," are convenient examples. Tragicomedy is an ancient, self-explanatory term indicating a combination of two standard forms, and rather particularly a tragic theme with a happy ending. Sentimental comedy is so descriptive it requires no comment, while satire and burlesque are forms of approach to subjects that are entirely familiar. The miracle play is a kind of sacred drama that was performed by priests in the churches of medieval Europe for the religious instruction of the people. The mystery play was another medieval, more secular form presented by the trade-guilds or "misteries."

CHAPTER XXXIX

SALE

THIS chapter doubtless will command more attention for its subject matter than any other in the book. But that's only natural. Men and women (and little boys and girls) who have written plays, are more interested in having them produced than they are in being told how wrong they are. In fact, the most serious consideration of technique always comes after an author has been convinced that he is a ghastly failure. That is why there is so much truth in the old saying that for one's first play to succeed is a real calamity. We are to assume here, however, that the author has written a masterly work.

His first move will probably be to copyright it. This will gratify him somewhat and it won't do any more harm than to deprive him of a useful copy of his 'script, so I don't object to that. All I say in such connection is that a copyright, like a patent, is a mere license to fight in court, and really proves nothing about who wrote or who owns the play. It just records that on such-and-such a date such-and-such a person deposited a given play manuscript with the Register of Copyrights at Washington. A dozen strangers could obtain copyright certificates on copies of that same play immediately thereafter, without hindrance from the Government. It is now rather generally recognized that an author has all the necessary protection in his ordinary moral right defensible under the common law, without the other rigmarole. Copyright has, however, some international aspects that are valuable; and on international grounds it may be a good thing to obtain. But do as you like about it. All necessary information will be forwarded upon request and without charge by the Superintendent of Public Documents at the national

capital; and the fee for each registration is only a dollar.

According to one outworn theory of American copyright, the holder of the certificate issued is the owner of all rights in the work represented. An author copyrights his play, and when he sells it, transfers his copyright with due formality, to the manager. When other rights arise, stock production, for instance, the manager re-conveys stated portions of those to the author, but without surrendering the all-embracing copyright. Another theory is that the author holds the original copyright and grants therefrom shares in the various ways of earning profits. A third theory is that each of the subordinate rights is a separate entity to be separately copyrighted. But all of these notions are based on the premise that copyright definitely establishes proper ownership, which it certainly does not, any more than writing a letter to the Federal Government and obtaining a receipt therefore proves that a man is the rightful owner of a house. House-owners register deeds; but ownership is proved by the deeds, and not by the registry which merely proves that the deeds have been seen. The only real basis is a determination of the fact of ownership; and this can only be done by defining property rights under the common law, and if necessary, in a civil court.

THE UNSOLICITED 'SCRIPT

GETTING the play to the producing manager is simple enough. A copy is either taken directly to his office and left there with whoever is gracious enough to take it, or sent by mail or express. A stamped and self-addressed envelope for its possible return should accompany it unless the author has other plans for picking it up, in which case he should say so. Opinion differs about whether a playwright should have but one copy or more going the rounds at one time. On this point I am calloused. I believe in keeping as many copies working as I can. My rule is "first come first served;" and if two managers perform the miracle of accepting a 'script simultaneously, my rule then becomes to give it to that man who offers me the best terms and shows the stronger likelihood of living up to them. It has never been my observa-

tion that what is called sound business practice outside the theater discourages competition; and I see no reason for doing it in the theater, especially when a conscientious playwright has spent so long a time on the gambling chance that his play is worth doing, and needs—often desperately needs—prompt action. The best support of this view is that managers themselves generally admit its fairness.

In the first place, managers have their own troubles in reading 'scripts. Very few can guarantee a prompt consideration. The routine of their own proper business is frequently so great that it is six to eight weeks before they can think of devoting a couple of hours to the dubious possibility that the unknown T. Mortimer Whoosis has written a masterpiece that they ought to control. The matter is much complicated when the manager is well known as a producer of metropolitan successes. He at once becomes a target for playwrights produced and unproduced; and many a time in such an office I have seen a stack of unsolicited 'scripts that literally reached from floor to ceiling. Who can blame that manager for delay; and by the same token, who can blame the authors of those 'scripts for sending other copies around at the same time?

Unsolicited 'scripts are the biggest problem. Managers really haven't the time for them—and yet, once in a proverbial blue moon, a success arises out of their mass and makes all the worry and annoyance worth while. So he receives them, has them read and generally rejected as necessary evils. There is no mitigation when the author writes beforehand and asks if he cares to see his play. That only means extra correspondence, while without seeing the play, the manager could not honestly tell much about whether it would be a waste of his time or not. Better to send it in and trust to luck.

I conservatively suppose the average Broadway manager to receive a matter of three hundred plays a year. The number varies as his successes vary. If he is especially active the postman may bring him a thousand. Allowing two hours to each play, including incidentals such as reports and correspondence, would be six hundred hours for the average, or a total

of seventy-five eight-hour days, or two and one-half months! The manager surely is as important a business man as the president of your local bank—and the business of a bank, they say, is about ninety per cent moral risk. Would you expect the bank president to devote annually two and one-half months to consideration of speculative propositions back of which there is probably neither proved skill nor trained judgment? Hardly. Of course two hours are not devoted to each play that comes in. Some are too obviously worthless to require even ten minutes. That was the perfectly reasonable excuse of the British actor, Norman McKinnell, who, as playreader for Lena Ashwell, "read" 2,500 plays in two years. He said, incidentally, that not more than one-half of one per cent could be deemed even possible.

PLAYREADING PROBLEMS

SO, DESPITE the frequent contemptuous references to the playreading achievements of the manager's office-boy, the manager is not altogether to be blamed for referring some of this labor to his office assistants. He cannot always afford to pay an expert to read the 'scripts; and the compromises are at least proof of good intention. I could name three or four well-known producers who delegate most of their playreading to their stenographers. One even goes so far as to call his his "Average Public" because what she favors he is sure the public will like. On the other hand, the Ames office, the Belasco office and the William Harris office are representative organizations that maintain regular readers.

In the older days of repertory theaters, managers solved this difficulty by employing "house dramatists," or "dramaturgs" as they call them in Europe, whose duty it was not only to write original plays to fit the regular acting company and to meet technical deficiencies in other plays from outside, but to keep an alert eye on unsolicited 'scripts from newcomers. David Belasco and Henry C. De Mille were for a period house dramatists for Daniel Frohman's old Lyceum Theater Stock Company; A. R. Cazauban, author of "A Parisian Romance," and W. T. Price, adapter of Sudermann's

"Heimat" under its well-known English title, "Magda," both served in like capacity for the famous A. M. Palmer organization. Nowadays Willard Mack does similar work for larger producing companies; Max Marcin has trimmed and fitted for A. H. Woods and for the Shuberts.

But even these men are too important to have their time wasted on piffling stuff. There are plays so ineptly written that the office-boy may very well judge them fairly. Consequently the office-boy and the office-girl and the book-keeper and the switchboard-operator frequently take their turns in "weeding-out," so that what eventually reaches the dramaturg or the manager himself, is, theoretically at least, the *crème de la crème*.

In 1913, when I was doing a great deal of professional playreading, I wanted to see just what basis could be found for many of the generalizations being uttered upon the subject. So I took two hundred unsolicited pieces at random and considered them for purely statistical purposes. The result of the investigation was published anonymously in *The New York Times* for May 18 of that same year.¹ There were some interesting findings, among them that more than one-half came from New York City itself, that nearly a quarter came from the Middle West, with most of those from Chicago, and that the others, barring a half-dozen or so from Canada and from England, were sent from cities or suburbs of cities in New England and the South. It was also observable that plays by men were commonly on basic themes, vigorously treated, and were mostly dramas and melodramas, while the women went in for complex character analyses and heaviest leaning toward comedy and farce. What was most significant from the present standpoint, however, was the following table:

Rejected because of faulty material	91
Rejected because of defective construction	98
Rejected because of faulty treatment	7
Accepted	4

200

¹ In the dramatic section, under title, "The Hunt for Plays."

Conditions in America have changed very radically since 1913; but I rather imagine that that table would hold fairly good for two hundred unproduced plays taken at random to-day, with the exception that most managers would object now, as they would have objected then, that four acceptances per two hundred plays is far too high a percentage. When Charles Klein was playreader for Charles Frohman, according to his own statement, he carefully examined more than a thousand plays, recommending only twelve or fifteen; and of these three were produced—not one of them scoring a success.²

The manager must at some time read the play he intends to produce—or have it read to him. Reading to the manager is not an amateur's privilege. Many established dramatists do it by invitation. But even in those cases it is not always the advisable thing to do. The manager may not have a good "ear mind." On the other hand, if he has, he is likely to be correspondingly weak in powers of visualization, or "eye-mindedness." He often intends to give the play his full attention, but permits himself to be interrupted by 'phone calls and other office routine. When he peruses the play for himself it is ordinarily when he knows he is going to have a quiet hour or two—late at night at home, or traveling, when he really needs something to while away the tedium. Charles Frohman always did most of his playreading during his frequent trips between New York and London. The plays he carried, however, were only 'scripts that he had reason to believe might be profitable—pieces recommended to his attention or coming from hands that he knew to be responsible.

THE DECIDING VOICE

METHODS of reading vary greatly, of course; but the average producer warms up to a play by degrees. Long experience with futile stuff makes him regard even the recommended 'script with suspicion. If the cover is soiled and the page corners dog-eared with thumbing or turned-down here and

² "What the Playwright is Up Against," by Charles Klein, *The Saturday Evening Post*, Jan. 25, 1913.

there, or odd grains of pipe-tobacco filter out, he murmurs: "Aha—been read by every other manager in town and only brought to me as a last resort! Pretty certainly junk! That playreader of mine has no judgment anyhow!" However, if the pages have a generally professional look, the manager may pick the bunch up casually and riffle through them. A bit of dialogue catches his eye. It seem promising—and he drops a few more pages to see if the sample is representative. If it is, he may take the trouble to find how many characters there are, male or female, how many settings, whether it's a modern play or a period one and whether it's comedy or drama or what-have-you? If these matters meet with the exactions of his particular frame of mind, he may now check up on the "big moments" at the ends of the acts. They seem to have a "kick" or a "punch" or a "wallop," so he sends for his secretary and tells her not to disturb him with anything till he gives the word.

Forthwith he drops into his roomy upholstered chair, drapes his legs over one side of it—or perhaps seated in his swivel-chair he rests his feet on the desk (it really doesn't matter)—and settles down, his mind confidently made up that he'll find something radically wrong before he goes very far. If the typewriter ribbon with which the copy was made registered only faint impressions, or if the copy is a carbon and a bit blurry, he argues to himself, "Why should I strain my eyes when this author is asking favors of me?" So he bids his secretary tell the author to fetch him something more legible and goes on unconcerned about his other business. He may *not* do this, of course; it depends on the man. I'm only supposing a typical case. If he goes on reading and finds the introduction tedious or the situation trite when it finally is stated, he may yawn, start up, throw the 'script aside for formal rejection, pick up his golf-clubs and go off for the day.

Actual decision as to the play's merits is made in many ways dictated by the given manager's personal view of what a good play should be. Arthur Hopkins looks primarily for ideas, contending that, "no plays are right when first written; but if they have the idea, they soon can be made right."

With this goal before him, he assigns a minimum of 25% to each of four points in a good play: novelty, human interest, acting opportunity, and production opportunity, and then prays that the drama he is reading will make much more than the full 100.³ His specimen chart for "Within the Law" was this:

Novelty (above average)	40%
Human Interest (above average)	35
Acting Opportunity (unusual)	50
Production Opportunity (average)	25
	<hr/>
	150%

Winthrop Ames tells me that he fortifies his original opinion that a play is worth producing by judging each scene for its news and emotional values. He keeps tally with a simple system in which plus means good, minus means fair and a cipher stands for itself. But in neither of these convenient schemes have we the real basis of opinion; we cannot tell from them what Hopkins considers novelty or human interest and so forth, or what Ames regards as emotional or news content. Those are things that belong to their personal background or philosophy of life.

The fact is that each manager looks for a different sort of play, which is a perfectly natural thing accountable on the seldom realized ground that managers are not a class of robots but human beings with normal diversity of tastes. If Winthrop Ames cares to produce plays that would not stand a chance in the ordinary commercial theater scheme, that is his very excellent business; if Arthur Hopkins chooses to invigorate the amusement world with a fresh stock of ideas, that is splendid, too. The same applies to the production ideas of William A. Brady, A. H. Woods, J. J. Shubert, and A. L. Erlanger. The only obligation to which they should be held is that they shall do creditably the specific thing they set out to do.

I had a conversation the other day with Kilbourn Gordon that illustrates my point that managers are profoundly in-

³ Article in dramatic section of *The New York Times*, May 9, 1915.

fluenced by their personal philosophies of life. I have what amounts to a fondness for Kilbourn Gordon. Not a small part of it is based upon my admiration of the consistent and intelligent manner in which he views and carries on his own work. He produces plays in accordance with his conception of the people who constitute his audiences. He sees them as belonging to a Jazz Age, and has hit upon speed as the touchstone. Where I do not agree with him is in the stress that he places upon it—but that's only *my* opinion.

"Isn't there a place for quiet plays?" I asked him just to start him off.

"I'm afraid not," he replied unsuspectingly. "Look at the people at large. They're as restless as they can be. Naturally. Conditions have changed mightily in the past ten years. The business man now spends his time watching market reports jumping up and down and orders coming and going from the ends of the earth; his wife has her rounds of bridges and teas, for a lot of household appliances have lightened her housework and increased her playtime; the children have limitless sports and movies and dances. Time and space are no longer insurmountable. On New Year's Day I was telephoning in New York to North Carolina and at the same time listening to a football game at the Bowl of Flowers in Pasadena on the radio. Can you beat that? Closer industrial organization has shortened the working week; the air is filled with scientific wonders, and people's desires are filled so rapidly that they don't know what it means to wait for anything. Their momentum is terrific; their interest is correspondingly speed and sensation. See the demand at any public library for detective mystery stories. At such a pace, excited, restless people cannot appreciate quiet things without a gradual slowing-up. Take the folks who scurry over the countryside in their flivvers on a Sunday afternoon. 'O see that beautiful view!' says some one. 'Where?' And the immediate answer is, 'Too late—we've passed it now!' Can you expect people like that to come into a theater, directly off a busy street, and support quiet plays? I should say not!"

To provoke him I referred to Frank Bacon's "Lightnin',"

which certainly succeeded mightily without being violent. "Oh, that was the story of an old codger who was an awful liar," said Gordon, abandoning his formula for the moment. "People know such figures in their own lives, know them for lovable characters. There was George Kelly's 'The Show-Off,' too. Everybody thought he recognized his neighbor in the name part, just as his neighbor recognized him."

But when I mentioned "Abie's Irish Rose" Gordon was instantly back on his favorite theme. "More speed!" he exclaimed. "Two young people have experiences in the space of two hours, that in life would take months and years."

A MANAGER'S SPECIFIC NEEDS

THERE is more to be considered than the manager's personal philosophy—the practical needs of his organization. He has stars under contract who must have vehicles. Perhaps he is known as a producer of musical comedies, and "regular" plays are a total loss as far as he is concerned. He is noted for gorgeous scenic spectacles and has no interest in dramas of the Carolina mountains. And so on and so forth. It is to be seen, therefore, that everything does not depend alone on the dramatist's circumstances and aims, but on those of the producer as well. All of which vastly complicates the urgent matter of selling the play.⁴

An outstanding difficulty is that trying to fit the needs of one producer the dramatist is apt to limit his market so seriously that if that producer turns him down he won't have any other place to go. That is the real reason that George Arliss has so much trouble finding plays. The established dramatists, who would be honored and overjoyed to have him in their plays, know that if he rejects what they write with him in view, there probably will be no other place to take

⁴ See "The True Adventures of a Play," being the story of the trials and tribulations of "D'Arcy of the Guards," by Louis Evan Shipman, New York, 1914. Also: "Breaking Into the Playhouse," anonymous, in *The Saturday Evening Post*, Feb. 21 1914; "Confessions of a Playwright," anonymous, in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, Jan. 14, 1914; "How I Made Belasco Produce My Play" ["The Case of Becky"], by Edward Locke, in *McClure's*, May, 1912, and "The Job of Jobs," by Augustin MacHugh, in the *Sunday Magazine of The New York Tribune*, Nov. 3, 1912.

them. Walker Whiteside might do; but he writes his own vehicles. About all remaining would be to sell it to Lon Chaney for the movies—and the movies buy very few original stories. Much safer, thinks the cautious playwright, to write something more general. Maurice Samuels had a heartbreaking time placing his spectacular drama "The Wanderer," because few producers cared to risk so expensive a production. In the end he was obliged to forego all but a tiny share of the original profits for a limited time, and probably also his share in extra rights, to see it done.

PLAY-BROKERS

WITH this broad situation that I have merely sketched, it is obvious that the dramatist who has made no careful estimate of the producers, their likes and dislikes, their circumstances and their needs, is likely to waste months of his time trying to put square pegs into round holes. This is where the professional play-broker comes in. He or she—for women are especially prominent in this field—presumably makes a careful study of all these things. He or she is supposed to enjoy, moreover, the confidential regard of certain producers who will order from that source first. But here again the dramatist must remember that brokers are human beings too, unable to work miracles. Their judgments are not always sound; they often are not in as good standing with producers as they think they are. The request for certain sorts of plays that a manager sends them, frequently are mimeographed or otherwise duplicated and sent simultaneously also to other agents. They often are too intent on keeping in with a manager for future business to force the issue over one neglected play. They often will withhold A's drama from the office of one who is its logical producer because they already are awaiting consideration there on B's comedy; and there are many more devices that are perhaps legitimate enough as business practice, but that give no real compensating advantage to the author.

That is the dark side of the shield. On the bright side, a good agent will not accept a play for handling to begin

with, unless he personally believes in it. He keeps plays in circulation and confers at reasonable intervals with his authors. He is energetic in seizing opportunities, and in working up best terms for all concerned. Having negotiated a contract it is for him to attend to collection of royalties and monies for extra rights that may be sold. His proper, recognized fee for such service is ten per cent of the author's share; and when the service is really rendered, the fee is none too much.

THE MANAGER WANTS YOU

WHEN a manager sends for an author, let him not leap for joy in the assumption that his play is taken. Managers have sent urgently for me more than once to ask if I didn't have something else to show them beside the play already in hand. One telephoned me to fetch him a more legible copy. Another had my agent wire me from New York all the way to New England where I had a company on location producing a picture. For a few minutes I debated whether to turn the company over to my assistant and make the ten-hour trip to town and back, and then, knowing how many false alarms there are, decided to stay on the job and see the manager later. When I did come home he sent word that he still wanted to see me urgently. I hurried to his office with my agent. "I like your play," he said; "but I want you to change this and this and this"—finding something wrong with virtually everything, beginning with the title, reversing the sexes of characters and generally working havoc. At that time I was engaged on another play and the little comedy in question didn't mean so much to me, so I said, "Very well; where is your contract?" He stared at me in amazement and burst into light, silvery laughter. "Why, I don't know whether or not you can alter it to suit me," he explained, and then went on in the most naïve manner imaginable, "Change it—and if I like it, then I'll sign the contract." I hope the reader will forgive me for saying that I told the gentleman where he could go. It makes me angry even now, just to think of it.

On one occasion a very well-known producer sent for my

agent to explain that he liked a play of mine well enough to do it, but hadn't been able to convince his silent partner, who controlled the cash, that it was worth doing. To this day he never has turned the play down definitely, although years have passed and I long ago took the 'script from him. It is trying enough to have to convince two managers instead of just one; but there are producers—and particularly one—who haven't enough stability of character to make and abide by their own judgments. That particular one was the subject of a conversation I had the other day with a well-known broker. The broker said that if that manager submitted a play that he personally liked to sixteen friends who indorsed his judgment, and the seventeenth friend advised against it, that play would not be produced. That is why it is always consoling to do business with men who stand on their own feet, even when they are shrewd traders and might take an advantage if one's back was turned. But in business, as in all other manifestations of life, one has to read character a little. I have been friends and have worked profitably for years, off and on, for one of the most undependable men in the theater. Nobody else has dealt successfully with him for so long a time; they wonder how I do it. My secret is simply outdoing him in generosity—a state of affairs that he positively will not permit. The others lose out simply because they always approach him with drawn swords and their armor on. I'm not boasting; I'm knocking wood as I set this down.

In ordinary circumstances a couple of weeks is time enough for a manager to decide whether he wants a play or not. Not many will respond so quickly, however. A fortnight after I have left a 'script at an office, I generally go looking it up, if it's only to remind the manager that he has it. Then I give him another two weeks; and if he hasn't decided by then, I take it away. When one makes so drastic a move, the manager is usually galvanized into some activity and begs for a day or two longer. If he seems in earnest, give in to him; but don't delay more than that. He's not in earnest—and casual producers are a poor sort to sponsor anything. Herbert Hall Winslow, who has written some fifty-eight pro-

duced plays and two hundred active vaudeville sketches and therefore ought to be able to speak with authority, tells me that he has never yet known a manager who dilly-dallies over a play to do anything useful about it in the end. I've had managers argue this point with me; but I always close the discussion by explaining that I am earning my bread and butter in the theater. My playwriting is not an avocation; and I can't afford to waste time. Do you want my play or don't you? I am not interested in how close you came to doing it. The fact is that you don't want it; a miss is as good as a mile—and I've failed as far as this office is concerned. Why prolong the conversation? Give me my play and let me put it to work in another office. . . . Harsh words, you say? Well, playwriting is a harsh business. You can't pay your butcher, baker and candlestick-maker with sentiment. And the producer knows that as well as you do.

THE ROUGH AND READY

As WINTHROP AMES and William Harris, Jr., differ from some of the discourteous managers I have preferred not to name, so one finds the same variation in players advertised in the incandescents. Francis Wilson, George Arliss, Frank Craven, and Roland Young are among the names that I recall gratefully for scrupulous kindness in considering plays that I have submitted to them; but there are others who have lost 'scripts or mislaid them for too long to make those copies any good. One, while *en tour*, sent my play to his home in a trunk that he did not unlock for nearly a year; another, after requesting a copy of my play because the title and theme intrigued him, suddenly refused to answer a bombardment of letters and telephone calls from my agent and myself—and I was ultimately able to obtain the play and his answer only by studiously insulting him on grounds of age and waning popularity that I took pains to see were his tenderest points.

The star actor frequently writes his own play—on the anonymous basis provided by somebody else's original 'script. It sometimes happens that such expert collaboration is necessary; but it also chances, rather too often to be mere coin-

cidence, that the star sees in the scheme a chance to cut in on some additional royalties. There are notable exceptions, of course. Many authors so ensnared are common-sense about it. The star is a great favorite, they reason, and good for a long season on the road in any vehicle at all, on which account half the royalties over that period will be more in the end than the profits from a brief and doubtful metropolitan run.

Which reminds me that certain managers also insist that all new authors coming into their organizations shall permit the house dramatists to revise their plays for a stated bit of the royalties. One such producer insisted that a play by a man I knew should be thus rewritten by Avery Hopwood. Hopwood read the play and, to his everlasting honor, returned it to the producer with a sharp note. "In my opinion this is a good play," he said in substance. "I do not know the author; but he is so clearly a professional hand, that any revision that in your opinion may be necessary, can best be done by him." As a result of this splendid rebuke, my friend's play was eventually produced with his name alone as author.

A long and entertaining account might be written of the odd circumstances in which plays are often accepted for production—and I have on my table now a lot of notes that would serve admirably to that end; but the fact is that this is not, primarily, at least, a book of anecdotes. It is enough that I have sketched the essentials of how plays should be submitted; and it now remains to say something about the contractual arrangements that one should make when his play is taken.

NEW NOTIONS OF AUTHOR'S RIGHTS

THE ordinary payment when a drama is accepted, long has been five hundred dollars. This merely pays for the option of producing the play within a certain time—usually six months. When that time elapses, the manager commonly has been permitted to renew his option for another six months' period, and also perhaps for a third, but in each case

on payment of another sum of five hundred. Without such payment the play is forfeited to the author. More than one dramatist has boasted to Broadway that he has made more money on an unproduced play postponed in this fashion, than on another that had been produced and had flickered out. But, for reasons that managers have sometimes in this comparatively inexpensive way withheld meritorious plays from production for years, this indeterminate delay is now frowned upon by established dramatists.

According to the "Reminiscences" of F. C. Burnand, in the London *Theatre* for January, 1896, "Dion Boucicault began the system of either sharing or taking a percentage which has worked so well for dramatists generally." According to various other accounts, the "sliding scale" royalty system, whereby an author increases his share as receipts pile up for a successful engagement, was perhaps invented and quite certainly was introduced to America, by Charles Frohman. In its simplest form this gave the author five per cent on the first \$3,000, seven and one-half on the next \$2,000, a flat ten beginning with the next \$2,000, and perhaps fifteen on all over \$10,000. This helped greatly to open the way to a more equitable division of profits than had previously obtained; but it was the exception rather than the rule.

Unscrupulous managers were only too prone to take advantage of authors unfamiliar with their own sharp practices, or unable to object because of the producer's commanding position. Many an American author at the close of the past century and in the first quarter of the present one, looked enviously, therefore, at the complete control of the producing and publishing situation by the organized writers of France. In the meantime economic conditions in America were rapidly changing, and many extra forms of profit began to appear—but managers claimed these as parts of their original purchases. Rights that formerly were worthless, as leasing for straight publication and novelization, for Chau-tauqua and amateur performances, or non-existent, as motion picture, radio, and little theater rights, are now rich sources of profit.

The notorious "Heir to the Hoorah" case, that began about 1907, brought so many intentional and unintentional evils to a focus of attention, that in 1912 native writers organized themselves primarily for protective purposes, as The Authors' League of America. "The Heir to the Hoorah" was a successful play written by Paul Armstrong and produced by Kirke La Shelle. Henry Damm brought suit against La Shelle alleging that the dramatist had stolen his idea from Damm's copyrighted story published in *Smart Set*. William Thompson Price was Damm's expert in the case, and succeeded in convincing the court that the allegation was true. Subsequent developments, however, were what lifted the case from being an ordinary plagiarism suit and made it *une cause célèbre*. During the affair sometimes it was held that Armstrong owned the play and that therefore Damm should have sued him instead of La Shelle; again it was maintained that as the magazine held the copyright, its publishers should have begun the action alone. Other ramifications filled the records and I shall not attempt to name them. Suffice it to say that the case held on in the courts for some thirteen years before final settlement, both Damm and La Shelle dying in the interval and the action being continued by their widows.

The Society of American Dramatists and Composers, founded by Bronson Howard, did not respond as promptly as the Authors' League, but after various internal discussions announced the preparation of a model contract. The Authors' League invited the Society to coöperate with its own members, and plans were afoot for this when a rift occurred in the Society. Some of the dramatists thereupon formed a separate Guild within the League; and this Guild, especially under the energetic leadership of Arthur Richman and George Middleton, has succeeded in defining the rights of the dramatists so clearly that the general platform enjoys the hearty indorsement and support of both Society and League. The work of the Guild is now sustained like the famous authors' organization at Paris, by a scale of assessments on the plays of its members.

THE "MINIMUM BASIC AGREEMENT"

WITH this as a background I may now proceed to sketch what is referred to by the Guild as its "Minimum Basic Agreement."⁵ A member may reach certain special understandings with a manager, and for this a separate form is provided; but he is pledged not to yield at any time more than the minimum form states. So many dramatists and managers have subscribed to this scheme for a trial period of five years beginning in 1926, that the present situation in America constitutes virtually a closed shop. It is all but impossible for a responsible manager or a reputable playwright to do business on Broadway to-day without becoming party to the arrangement, provisions being made for joining as the occasion arises.

Authors are permitted to employ their own agents to conduct their own business affairs. The production must be first-class. Unless a shorter term is specifically provided for in the contract, the play must be produced within six months of signing—not including the idle summer months of June, July and August.⁶ This is also save when the manager avails himself of his right to a single extension of three to six months, for which he must pay a sum not less than the initial advance. If the play is not in rehearsal three weeks before the expiration of the second option period, or if the second payment is not in hand three weeks before the end of the first option, the play reverts to the author. The play must be performed seventy-five times a year for the manager to retain his right of first-class production in the United States and Canada; and he must produce the play for seventy-five

⁵ I wish to acknowledge here the courteous attention of Ivan von Auw, Jr., Assistant Secretary of the Authors' League of America, in checking the details of this section.

⁶ It has been objected that the exclusion of these summer months is likely to work a hardship on the dramatist at times, by turning a six-months' option into a nine-months' delay. Moreover, signing such a clause on the last day of April might thus result in the loss of nearly a whole season, production not being imperative till the following March when business is beginning to slacken anyway. Of course, it must be borne in mind that this refers to the Minimum Basic Agreement, with better terms to be made befitting particular circumstances.

performances on the road or for three consecutive weeks in the New York metropolitan district within six months after the initial production, before he may acquire any interest whatever in stock, motion picture, or other dependent rights. The manager's interest in the stock rights endures for only three years from the date when the play is released for stock—a period beginning when the piece ceases to be a road attraction—unless there is in the third year a minimum of seventy-five stock performances. As soon as the annual stock total is less than that, the stock rights revert to the author and with them all other dependent rights among which are named, Little Theater, Amateur, Chautauqua, Repertoire, Tent, Condensed-Version, and Musical Comedy Adaptation. It is unnecessary to go further here into other technicalities of the Minimum Basic Agreement which every author will see very clearly for himself and in due time when the occasion arises.

Virtually all these points have long been observed in regular Broadway contracts, and just as equitably. The form is not revolutionary; and this is the secret of its prompt adoption by both sides. What it does is to establish uniform agreements for authors who for one reason or another cannot command their due rights, and through the backing organization to force recalcitrant managers into line. This is excellent in many ways; but the individual author must always remember that in making a contract the parties should have mutual respect and good faith. Generally speaking, a contract originally drawn in a state of hostility, isn't worth the paper upon which it is written.

PART TWELVE

THE NEXT PLAY

CHAPTER XL

THE WORLD OF IDEAS

ONCE again the reader must be reminded that the choice of play material depends heavily upon the dramatist's personal philosophy of life for which the writer of a work on playmaking method must disclaim responsibility. Yet this particular work would be evading duty without a few suggestions as to how dramatic ideas are located and pried loose from the mass of theatrically useless stuff in which they are commonly embedded.¹

It may appear that the logical place for a section chapter of this sort is at the start, but it has been deliberately held for the close because the reader, knowing now what is done with play ideas after one gets them, the purpose to which they are to be put and the manner in which they are to be developed, can better understand and agree with the certain recommendations to follow. It is the author's view, too, that one may pick dramatic material more surely after a thorough grounding in dramatic method—and also it is to be supposed that the person who has sought to learn the craft with sufficient earnestness to read this weighty book, is in the profession to stay and will write not just one play but as many more as his lifetime will permit.

RELATIVE UNIMPORTANCE OF TECHNIQUE

TECHNIQUE is only a means to an end, a way of employing a medium of expression for best effect, a "how to do"—and

¹ Some other suggestions may be found in Price's "Technique of the Drama," New York, 1892, especially pp. 5-16 inclusive.

never, in the completest sense of theater, either the end sought or the material out of which the play is made. Technique, moreover, is *never* as important as the material or the purpose. It affects the nature of purpose and material only in that a sound playwriting technique, being based in psychology of the audience, cannot lend itself fully to an end subversive of that psychology—an end which may be either sustained immorality or merely a sort of appeal better fitted to a different form of expression.²

So, when some one puts the question, "Is a technically perfect play necessarily a good play?" let the answer be along these lines: It all depends on what is meant by "technique" and by "good." If technique means the mere machinery by which a play moves, then a technically perfect drama is not at all necessarily a good play. If by good is meant approaching the ideal which the author had in mind, irrespective of anybody else's opinion of how he should have done it, the question cannot be answered without knowledge of the express circumstances. If by good is meant successful, then a technically perfect play is not necessarily a good play because many things that are beyond the dramatist's power to control go to make a box-office winner. In the world of the theater one frequently hears of plays that are well made but that fail because their themes are too slight or untimely. On the other hand, there are compositions that have very little expert stage technique about them but that nevertheless greatly entertain audiences because of their sheer cleverness in some one respect. Thus it is related that Jonathan Swift's "Polite Conversation," written in dialogue form, in 1731, was so well received by the public when first published in 1738, that admirers in Dublin put it on the stage there successfully, unchanged.

The importance of technique, abstractly considered, must not be exaggerated. Michael Faraday, eminent British chemist and physicist, addressing his class one day on the limitations of chemistry, said that he had analyzed a mother's

² In considering whether Virgil wrote his poem from the statue or the sculptor made the statue from the poem, Lessing brings out the essential differences in approach of the two kinds of artist. Lessing's "Laökoon," Chaps. V, VI and VII.

tears and found them salt and water, which told nothing of their true character. Roy C. Flickinger, one of the most brilliant theater archæologists anywhere—brilliant because he has penetrated the dramatic reasons for theaters being as they are and so has uncovered truths longer buried in the figurative dust of stodgy scholarship than in the literal dust of time—says in the preface to his "Greek Theater and Its Drama" (p. xiv f.): "I maintain the self-evident proposition that it is possible for a play to observe all the technical rules arising from the conditions of performance in a theater and before an audience and yet be so lacking in poetry, in truth to life, in inherent worth, as to be undeserving the name of 'drama.' It is evident, then, that craftsmanship must be the medium of the playwright, not his sole possession." I add that one should never try to justify the merit of a play that has failed, on the ground that it has conformed with any set of rules. Rules alone are never enough to insure success.

For the London *Contemporary Review* of April, 1906, Philip Littell wrote a scathing indictment of Pinero as contrasted with Ibsen. In this severe but nevertheless useful article, entitled, "Dramatic Form and Substance," the author said in part: "Mr. Pinero's deficiency in matter might have appeared as striking or more striking if he had written novels. To say that he is naked, mentally, is perhaps inexact, but at most he is lightly clad. . . . Mr. Pinero is not chiefly interested in anything except dramaturgy. Sex relations attract him because he knows he can make them interesting to playgoers, can draw from them 'situations' and dramatic moments." Continuing, then, by likening Pinero to, "a master-artificer of elaborate cocktails who doesn't drink," Littell doubts that the celebrated dramatist "ever had anything else to express but a prodigious skill at playmaking."

Out of his admiration of Ibsen as a playwright who combines both form and substance, Littell proceeds to accord technique its logical place: "This mistake of persons who speak thus disparagingly of technique lies in their failure to perceive that the most useful or ornamental cargo may be carried in a vessel steered with superlative ability. The cargo in an artist's charge is what he had heard, felt, seen, divined:

the passengers are his subconscious selves; his aim is to handle his craft with skill and until the end of his labor he gives passengers or cargo hardly a thought."

It is scarcely fair to dismiss this utterance without reminding readers here that, granting that Sir Arthur Wing Pinero may have placed making of plays above profound observations, his fine development of craftsmanship at a time when the theater was overburdened with outworn conventions, has enormously aided those of more recent maturity to use the theater effectively. But Littell raised an important point. His fault was in using for stalking-horse a man whose best work did not (in 1906) belong to the changed conditions that he really helped to bring about. Since 1906, Pinero has written the powerful "Thunderbolt" and "Mid-Channel," and the highly imaginative "Enchanted Cottage."

But just that the reader's opinion concerning technique may not now swing too far the other way, I quote J. Hartley Manners, author of "Peg o' My Heart" and one of the really thoughtful craftsmen in the theater. He placed himself on record long ago with the view that: "Public approval or disapproval is very rarely, when one comes to think of it, concerned with the underlying idea of a play. That the public is content to take on its own merits. What it insists must be done is that the idea be told interestingly. That is, public criticism is nine-tenths criticism of method."³ And says Dumas, *fils*, in his celebrated preface to "Un père prodigue:" "Technique alone never made a dramatist; but if one would be a master in this art, he first must be proficient in its technique."

The shrewd observation by Hartley Manners is borne out in large part by the striking fact that the great playwrights of all time have rarely devised original plots. The classic Greek tragedians adapted the received legends of their people. The comedian, Aristophanes, probably contrived his own plots because they were burlesques of contemporaneous affairs; but Shakespeare and Molière and many another occupant of a niche in the dramatic gallery of fame, were consistent borrowers. Goethe, whose masterpiece, "Faust," was his story

³ Interview in *The New York Press*, Dec. 7, 1913.

only in so far as he improved it, even recommended the policy. He said: "If I were to begin my artistic life over again, I should never deal with a new story. I should always invest the old stories with new and more vital meanings."⁴

So plots used in the classic plays were often stories that already were well known to their original audiences. At the same time, one must not forget that they were stories so fundamentally exciting that retelling could not dull them. These age-old, universal tales have been traced back by ethnologists to the savage "Stone Age" of man's development when his poorly understood environment was filled with wonder and dread; and they are correspondingly strong in power to move.⁵ People still and always will enjoy hearing again, in one form or another, the stories of Jack the Giant Killer, Puss in Boots, Cinderella, the Wanderings of Ulysses, Sinbad the Sailor, and all the rest that fond recollection will bring to mind. Charles Frohman therefore showed excellent judgment when he stated his firm belief that in these so-called nursery tales were the surest and best formulæ for dramatic plots.⁶

THE OUTSIDE SOURCE OF IDEAS

BUT however one may deprecate the making of new stories, no conscientious writer will be satisfied until he finds out how they are made and proves to his own satisfaction that he personally can devise them. Even if the "world-plots" just mentioned were built up by the successive additions of many persons over hundreds and perhaps thousands of years, no reader will acknowledge without trying, that making similar ones lies beyond his unassisted ability to do. His self-confidence is bulwarked by the indubitable fact that successful writers are constantly devising clever arrangements that must be called original in any reasonable sense. Especially

⁴ "Conversations," Sept. 18, 1823.

⁵ See especially Andrew Lang's essay under the heading "Tale" in the 11th "Encyclopædia Britannica," Vol. XXVI, p. 369d. Also, "The Childhood of Fiction," by J. A. MacCulloch. London, 1905.

⁶ According to John D. Williams, who was long Frohman's general manager. In the *Century Magazine*, December, 1915.

in this age of scientific progress there is at hand for the plot-builder a vast array of previously unheard-of material, out of which, for instance, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle built his fascinating Professor Challenger tales.

In "The Lost World" the Professor organized and carried out an expedition to find the dinosaur and the pterodactyl and the archæopterix still living on a tropical plateau. In "When the World Screamed" the Professor conceived the earth to be in itself a living creature, with a physical organization like a sea-urchin, and, by sinking a shaft several miles through the crust and jabbing a drill still further, proved it so to be. In "Maracot Deep" the same distinguished author detailed the great adventure of another eccentric scientist who had figured the probable nature of the lowest abyss in the ocean floor, but had not anticipated finding there the lost City of Atlantis, much less living descendants of its first inhabitants.

These instances are, as I say, "original in any reasonable sense." At the same time the stories quite certainly grew in Doyle's mind from suggestions of fact. For decades explorers have been bringing out of the Amazonian jungles rumors of prehistoric monsters wallowing in well-nigh inaccessible swamps; the "lost Atlantis" has been a matter of scholarly speculation for centuries. What suggested a sea-urchin world browsing on air in the course of its orbit, is difficult to suppose—and yet there is no doubt that Doyle's rich imagination received in this case also, a hint from the world outside his own prolific mind.

I am not trying to lessen in any degree the well-earned, high, and long sustained standing of Doyle, whom I greatly admire. On the contrary, I have deliberately picked these narratives of his as striking recent examples of story ingenuity. The reason I have said that he certainly received suggestions from which they grew, is that in this world nobody really "invents" material; one only invents *combinations*. Material exists independently of the dramatist; his part lies in the use he makes of it. This, perhaps, is just another phase of the great natural law that man cannot create

Lee meets girl for first time. She is engaged to X. A man from the west. Lee worked on papers in the west. X vaguely familiar to him. Lee has friend in house, in whom he can confide. Takes 2 per cent of game, perhaps. Both broke. Pressing need for money.

Game on a Sunday night.

X killed a man in a poker game once, went to jail, and escaped. Lee covered the story. One or two of X's poker mannerisms become public property as the result of this escapade, and it is these, now repeated, that put Lee on the trail. He is very suspicious by the time the game ends, but does not have his proof as yet.

Lee's employer, not present, does not want his men to gamble. It means dismissal. His tabloid has a highly moral slant. Lee has about five thousand and desperately needs five more. This money situation of Lee's must be built up -- for two acts it is the main plot. The rest flows afterwards. It is the situation when the game halts early in Act, with Lee an enormous winner. He is very gay, a little drunk, beginning to make frank remarks about the guests. His friend manoeuvres to have the game end -- wants Lee to go home. Lee, however, is eager for more, and at bigger stakes. "I'm playing on their money now," father antagonizes the girl at this stage of the proceedings -- the qualities that she liked in him in Act I are submerged at present. He is probably the only winner at this stage -- by his buoyancy may be enough to see him through this act, without a lot of plot to help him. Keep the plot, so far as it involves him, until Act 3. The others are losers, and under the strain thereof their own stories have reached climaxes earlier. The man who quarrels with his wife, the two men who quarrel over the wife of one, the host and his wife at odds because he has started game against her wishes, and it has brought trouble.

Courtesy of the Author

PLOT NOTES FOR A NEW PLAY BY GEORGE S. KAUFMAN

"Here is something hot from the griddle," he writes, "although the play to which it refers may never be written, and will most certainly contain none of the ingredients referred to on this memorandum." Mr. Kaufman is one of Broadway's most persistent collaborators, being co-author of "Dulcy," "To The Ladies," "Merton of the Movies," "Beggars on Horseback," "Minick," "The Cocoanuts" and "The Royal Family" among others. In addition to all this he remains dramatic editor of *The New York Times*.

energy: he can only transform it—in this case transform it from the material into the spiritual.

Concerning the main point, that no one invents facts, there can be no real issue. It is a well-known psychological truth, with an ever-increasing stock of evidence to support it. Human beings form their ideas about existing facts; and literary invention is primarily an association of such ideas. One can only make such an association by having the ideas to associate. So the greater the number of impressions that one has formed of the world, the more he or she is capable of making a rich combination.

Now, many persons are surrounded throughout their lives with rich story material, but because they pay no especial attention to it, do not speculate upon it, they themselves have no ideas that would interest the world at large. Instance the cub reporter who was sent to "cover" a fashionable wedding and wrote nothing because, he told his editor, nothing happened—"the bride didn't show up." John Fox, Jr., found a rich literary field in what is only a drab, pitiful life to "hill-billies" in the Kentucky mountains; George W. Cable found splendors of romance unsuspected by the Creoles of Louisiana of whom he wrote; "Charles Egbert Craddock" worked similar wonders with scenes in Tennessee. One of the first requisites, therefore, for a writer seeking to develop his professional mind, is for him to learn to observe—which means also to form ideas about his observations.

Youngsters, in their formative period, cannot be expected to make profound judgments.⁷ Moreover, youth is a rebellious time which has its wholesome effect in ridding the world of hokum and bunk; but in assailing the abiding things of life it must appear ridiculous just because it *is* youth. I recall the kindly tolerance with which the Reverend S. Parkes Cadman recently answered this question propounded to him in public meeting: "I am nineteen years of age and an atheist. Can you give me proof of God?" "There are young persons in every generation who declare with a kind of defiant pride

⁷ "I especially warn you against great inventions of your own; for then you would try to give a view of things, and for that purpose youth is seldom ripe."—Goethe, "Conversations," Sept. 18, 1823.

of discovery that Shakespeare bores them. No doubt he does; but it is conceivable that this reflects not on Shakespeare but on them. In view of the sound, mature judgments that do like, have liked, and will like Shakespeare, it would seem better for these youngsters to be silent until their blood runs cooler, and in the interval to seek earnestly those virtues in the great plays that their unformed understanding *can* admire.

For youth to conceive ideas that may be worth talking about, it's an excellent plan to read and to listen to supposedly distinguished ideas of other persons on the same subjects; but the writer should get his own impressions first hand. Other persons may guide him; but they should not separate him from the basis of all judgments. The dramatist is going to write about life. What life? The life he knows, or the life he has merely heard or read about? There are certain aspects of life that offer him reading as his only recourse—scenes from history, for instance; but the human parts of these he still may test by his own living, direct experience. In the judgments of other persons one never gets facts in their completeness; and facts in their completeness, their trivialities especially, may be richly suggestive to the story-builder, for he has his own, personal, peculiar store of ideas to be combined with, or at least to be stimulated by, this latest impression.

THE MENTAL STOREHOUSE

IN ORDER to understand the nature of literary invention, one must first apprehend something of the way in which the mind stores up impressions.⁸ The mind of the new-born child is a blank that is more or less filled in as life proceeds. In growth he begins by recognizing fundamental differences between the facts that impress his senses. He establishes in his mind, consequently, certain heads under which he subsequently classifies his experiences for ready reference. When he encounters an experience that won't fit under one of the heads he already has, he adds another head.

⁸ The clearest detailed discussion of this subject is in James's "Psychology."

If there are but comparatively few of these heads it means that he recognizes but few distinctions in the facts of his experience. He sees life in terms of broad relationships. It means that he has completed his idea of the scheme of things and has ceased to grow. He will stop growing the sooner if an unfortunate early success convinces him that he is right. A man of this type, however, is frequently a leader, for his judgments are positive, and he often reaches material success at an early age. He accepts or rejects promptly, and seldom compromises. If he rejects, no modification of the original plan will do; there must be complete substitution. This is all proof of the character that has completed its circle. Woe betide such a character if its circle encompasses too little. As Roger Bacon said in his "*Opus Majus*," the four principal impediments to wisdom are authority, habit, prejudice, and false conceit of wisdom.

On the other hand, the mind of the man who is ever recognizing fine distinctions contains many heads. He has the richer mind, but because it is so much longer in rounding out its broad judgments of the world, material success generally comes to him late in life—if it ever comes at all. He is distinguished for his irresolution; he hesitates about making up his mind upon any subject because he knows human fallibility so well. He continues to grow for a longer period than the other man, but unlike him, not knowing his own mind and unable to act promptly and firmly, he cannot persuade the world to take him seriously. It holds him in a sort of affectionate contempt for his tolerance, and utterly distrusts his attempts at leadership. He wins his place only when he has made his complete classification of ideas; but at that time he is no longer the same character. He now has become almost as positive and uncompromising as the narrower type—the present difference being that his judgments are finer in being broader based. This truth of existence has long been recognized by the philosophers. Viscount Morley, writing on Edmund Burke (in "*The Encyclopædia Britannica*"), says: "It is too often the case to be mere accident that men, who become eminent for wide compass of understanding and penetrating comprehension, are in their adoles-

cence unsettled and desultory. Of this Burke is a signal illustration."

Our best writers are of this latter type. They go through long periods of intellectual vagabondage, and rebel against the established order because it seems so blind. Mordant utterances and melancholia prevail because earnest achievement seems so impossible. But their real drawback is a natural law that before they may find success they must find themselves. Their ship seems water-logged, their sails in tatters, the gale an unending fury; but when they reach port at last they find that they have come slowly only because they have been carrying a heavy cargo of riches.

DEVELOPING ONE'S FANCY

WHAT we call imagination is wealth of associated ideas; and wealth of associated ideas is wealth of observation in wealth of experience. It is out of what you have acquired that you give. I know this to be true. I have worked my own experience and hearsay so thoroughly into my plays and my books that it is a temptation, in looking back, to believe that I had the experience for the express purpose of my writing—and I'd believe so, too, did I not know that such material is the only stuff out of which one may fabricate works of the mind.

So of course it's true that knowing the craftsmanship of playwriting is only a minor part of what goes into making good playwrights. So of course, also, the aspiring writer must learn life avidly, for he needs all the ideas he can get to be evoked at the proper time when life presents him the slenderest clew. The richness of his mental background is the richness of his fancy. The play of fancy is merely encouraging these associations by an effort of will to form and re-form. The more associated ideas that he can bring to cluster around the tiny suggestion from life the sooner will he evolve the original plot that he seeks.

To enrich the fancy what life should the dramatist study? Well, all life. Let him not spend his whole time analyzing his own feelings. In Jane Ellen Harrison's "Prolegomena

to the Study of Greek Religion" there is a pertinent comment. "The Greeks of the 6th century B. C. had taken for their motto 'Know Thyself,' " she says; "but at the fountains of self-knowledge no human soul has ever yet quenched its thirst."⁹ The dramatist never can know too much in his profession. Its canvas is the whole world. If he has no background of associated ideas for a given fact that he wants to use, he should look it up. The research will bring him all kinds of interesting things to broaden his view. In the course of my writing I have been obliged to provide stories and film plays for a bewildering variety of purposes; but I am grateful for the opportunity the work has given me to learn something of the history of medicine, of the fine arts, of copper mining, smelting and refining, of organization and operation of industrial museums, of community chest campaigns, of water supply, of city planning, of omnibus building, of sanatoria, of criminal investigation, of monetary reform, of economic and political history, of tornado relief, of the humane movement, of astronomy, of liquor prohibition—and so on, and on and on. It's all valuable in one way or another. When Belasco stages a play his research is tireless. When he was producing "Deburau," I encountered one of his agents in the New York Public Library, ransacking the files to find authoritatively whether or not in the period of the play, they wrapped nosebags in tinfoil!

There is so much specialization to-day that we are apt to forget the implications, clues, and easily available explanations offered by other branches of study. The shoemaker is not always wise in sticking to his last. An astonishing number of the great discoveries and inventions of the world is attributed to persons unconnected with the lines they benefited. I lately stood in the Deutsche Museum at Munich, looking at the life-size sectional model of a Bessemer converter that illustrates the process of making Bessemer steel. The head of the museum, Dr. Oskar von Miller, observing my interest, interested me still more by remarking that Henry Bessemer would never have conferred this benefit upon civilization had he been trained as an engineer. Engineers posi-

⁹ P. 445.

tively knew, prior to that invention, said he, that it was physically impossible for air to be blown through molten steel. Bessemer, being a laymen, did not know it, and in his blundering actually did it. Arkwright, the barber and dealer in human hair goods, is the great inventor of spinning machinery. Alexander Graham Bell, teacher of the deaf, invented the telephone. Again, Joseph Henry, the scientist, receives only a secondary credit for the invention of the telegraph; the world's honor goes to Samuel F. B. Morse, the portrait painter. Knowing a little of everything is thus an excellent state of mind for the practising dramatist. The "myriad-minded" Shakespeare was so encyclopædic in his knowledge of special subjects, apart from his matchless knowledge of the life that embraced them all, that many critics have found it difficult to think of him as one man. In a convenient Shakespeare bibliography I have just counted seventy-four authoritative books each of which describe the bard's excellence of information in some one department such as, angling, medicine, law, natural history, botany, printing, or sports.

THAT PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY

ATTENTION, conception, discrimination, association, memory, imagination, perception, and reasoning—so run some of the successive chapter heads in William James's "Psychology." A chain of development ending in reasoning, of course—for without the personal philosophy, the association of ideas isn't of much account. It is up to the dramatist himself to be alert; nobody can force him to be that. No more can one oblige him to discriminate, to associate, to memorize, to imagine, to perceive, or to reason. But if he intends to achieve greatness he must, of his own volition, do all of these things. He must put his effort into it.

It is not my place, even if I could assume it, to try to teach personal philosophy; but it is fitting that I should point out wherein originality in dramatic writing is based upon it. Ideas that are arresting and absorbing grow out of individual viewpoint; and individual viewpoint is a natural, inevitable development for any person who thinks. No two persons

have precisely the same experiences; and by the same token they cannot possibly view life from identical angles.¹⁰ If they continue to think, they will be bound to recognize their own inconsistencies; and doing that will endeavor to conform, fortify, or modify their views, all of which means developing that individual philosophy that is so eminently useful in the theater. I am attaching much importance to this matter because it is the great factor that determines whether or not the stage shall be worthily used. I think that it is scarcely necessary to add, in this late place, that I am anxious that the theater shall be so employed.¹¹ It is the fine opinion of Arthur Ruhl, expressed in his book, "Second Nights," that the playwright, first of all, must be a good citizen.

It is manifestly possible to go through this world without much character. It is perhaps easier, too, for it is also manifestly a lot of trouble to develop character. It takes time; it involves hard work; it means being discredited—and it usually means some poverty. Nevertheless, I think it pays. I know many persons who do not.

The magic formula is surprisingly easy to describe. One just keeps on thinking things through. The conscientious persons starts serenely with the motto, "Let your conscience be your guide," certain that harm cannot befall one in that course until suddenly he is brought up short by a contradiction. In accepting one fact of life he automatically has deprived himself, as a consistent man, of another fact that he would like to keep. If he would grow on—and the chances are that he will because he will want to justify the state of affairs that he prefers to have—he must reconcile these two

¹⁰ Moreover, as Goethe points out in his "Conversations," Feb. 17, 1831, the individual changes his viewpoint as he lives on through the years. "We see the world one way from a plain, another way from the heights of a promontory, another from the primary fields of the glacier mountains. We see, from one of these points, a larger piece of the world than from the other; but that is all, and we cannot say that we see more truly from any one than from the rest."

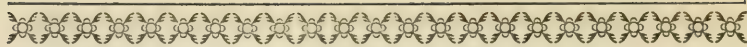
¹¹ "It is certain that to the making of good drama, as to the practice of every other art, there must be brought an almost passionate love of discipline, a white heat of self-respect, a desire to make the truest, fairest, best thing in one's power; and that to these must be added an eye that does not flinch. Such qualities alone will bring to a drama the selfish character which soaks it with inevitability."—John Galsworthy, "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama" in *The Fortnightly Review*, London, 1909.

irreconcilable positions. So philosophy begins. Life becomes no longer a matter of "I submit" and "I accept" unless accompanied by the qualifying statement, "—and I know why!"

He will go through horrible periods of doubt and disillusionment. He will encounter the postulates of the ancient philosophical schools that say, "I know: therefore I am," with the almost hopeless sequel, "I do not know whether I am or not!" He will think for a time that he cannot be sure of anything and therefore has no right to hold an opinion. His senses all may be made to trick his mind into false beliefs. Evidences will confront him. The man with his leg cut off may be made by irritation of the severed nerve-ends to feel pain in his missing toes; the bindfolded man touched with a bit of ice may be persuaded that he is branded with a hot poker. And so on. The whole outside world may be just a nightmare, a trick of his imagination.

Then, from this awful chaos, he will reason himself out. He will learn what faith is. His work-table may be a mere trick of his senses to-day; but if his senses give him the same impression to-morrow and the next day and the day after that, he is justified in accepting his table on faith as one of the facts of life. Without such facts one cannot build mounting happiness and prosperity from day to day. This is a comforting advance in personal philosophy. I know it is, for I've been through it. And by and by he learns to make positive judgments on conduct. This is a still greater advance. It means the beginning of executive strength, the honest knowledge that one's own decision is as authoritative as any other's in the same place. When that time comes, it is likely that the dramatist has become a real person, with something to say that will really be worth the while of the thousand or so persons who gather in a theater to hear it.

The scheme of life becomes complete only when one is able to find in it a place for every fact of his own experience. He will have learned to live. But even then the self-made philosopher *may not* be right in his judgments. All he may say for himself at that time is that he has achieved a degree of wisdom. What that degree is nobody will know for a thousand years after he has crumbled to dust.



CHAPTER XLI

WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS

THE whole basis of this long consideration of playmaking is human psychology—that the same mental structure of audiences that appreciates the theater in all its phases, also necessarily limits and defines the intelligibility and attractiveness of the art that appeals to it. The assumption that an art system of enduring value may be so made would seem to be upset by the additional fact that in the fine arts people are changing almost from day to day in their likes and dislikes. But to close observers it is apparent that these changes are merely in opinions of what is comic and what is tragic and so on, and not in the basic, eternal facts that comedy produces laughter and tragedy tears.

Not so many years ago it was considered the height of comic effect to pull a chair away just as a person was about to sit down—and I think I have quoted this before—whereas to-day the consensus of feeling is that it's just a mean trick. A similar "humanization" has forced other "practical jokes" steadily out of fashion. Because there has been so tremendous a development in civilized regard, the ideas of the tragic also have greatly altered. Death is no longer the peak of tragedy. We consider to-day that there are many things far harder to endure than death. So again we come to the importance of the dramatist's personal philosophy of life, of his ideals, of his initiative, of his penetration. His philosophy is separable from his technique, but it is part and parcel of his playmaking—and it is accountable here because this is a book not on technique alone but on playmaking as a whole.

As far back as the opening of the third chapter I remarked the advisability of considering the particular public that the

dramatist hopes to address, and also the existing system of distribution by which that public may be reached. As far as the public is concerned, it naturally divides into groups with special interests, groups that will sort themselves out as soon as appeals to their interests are placed within reach. The more groups that find something to their liking in the play, the more persons will hear the dramatist's message and the correspondingly more money will be turned into the box-office.

"ARTISTIC" SUCCESSES

Now it may be that the playwright scorns money and calls the consideration of what certain audiences like a base truckling to the commercial scheme. He may prefer to write a play that his heart alone desires, irrespective of the desires of anybody who shall ever see it beside himself. So be it. Plays composed in that haphazard way often do find a wide public by chance; but when they do not, it ill becomes their authors to rail because the works don't fit.¹

I am urging only clear-sightedness in the matter—that the author, who dismisses any part of the potential theater audience, shall realize the penalties he incurs. He is not foolish in restricting his appeal. Barrie and Galsworthy do it again and again. In many ways such an attitude is admirable. Plays deliberately written in terms of finer feeling can only hope for their best appreciation in persons who know what finer feeling is. Such spectators obviously are in the minority, and their support cannot be as profitable as would result from the richer support of something broader. At the same time finer feeling is the noblest expression of the human spirit and is infinitely more important as a cultural force than a mere stirring of coarse passions."

It is largely a question of whether a playwright will be

¹ On the abiding truth that a financial success may be also an artistic success, no writer is more inspiring than Henry Arthur Jones. See particularly his "Literature and the Modern Drama," in his "The Foundations of a National Drama," New York, 1913.

² Lessing was "firmly convinced that the gladiatorial shows were the principal cause why the Romans remained so far below mediocrity in the tragic art."—"Laökoon," p. 131.

satisfied with an artistic success or a financial success. "Artistic success" is not meant here in a deprecatory sense, and that although the term is frequently applied to a production having splendid inspiration but that fails because of faulty handling or an attempt to force it on an unsympathetic body of spectators. It would not be quite kind to give instances, and it would be needlessly controversial besides. The reader will find plenty of examples for himself in almost any metropolitan season. The meaning here concerns a play in which inspiration and handling both are worth while, and that moreover has been made available to its proper audience, but that does not make money because the class to whose comprehension and liking it is best adapted, is too small to support it.

One may not justly say that such plays should not be written. They frequently are products of genius, masterly in conception and treatment, and highly significant because they pave the way to better things. But their authors, gloriously impetuous and perhaps true altruists after all, must find their best reward in joy of work while waiting for another generation to catch up with them. We need such pioneers always. Their intelligent sacrifices should not be tossed aside by every one as the wide public dismisses them, although the wide public may be pardoned for its contempt of what it sees as snobbish and exclusive, for it necessarily knows no better; it has neither wit nor capacity to understand utterances of those who are spiritually in advance of it. But so mistaken a view does not become any one in the field of criticism where opinion is presumably and properly super-intelligent.

If a dramatist is content to suffer the martyrdom that "*succès d'estime*" implies, he should be given broad license to compose, being free from, among other things, the obligation to conform with the theatergoing situation of north, south, east and west. He has only to study that class that is capable of finer appreciation; and to this one may add that if he intends to observe the obligation to the full, he will have no mean task before him. If, on the other hand, the playwright wants financial success—which, as has been said

before, may and should be artistic, too—his audiences must be as large and as many as possible to make up the vast number of small sales necessary to box-office satisfaction. But in either case, he should, in justice to himself and to those who embark upon production with him, study the circumstances that he and his play are likely to encounter.

THE PLAY MACHINE

IN THE United States the situation is peculiar not merely in involving a national point of view produced by a few generations of democracy, but in the existence of a huge play machine—an enormous distributing organization through which every important commercial theater may be kept supplied with a constant succession of new attractions, while the largest productions, with hundreds of players and tons of scenery, may easily be moved from seaboard to seaboard with a dispatch that cannot be matched in any other country on the globe.

This machine finds reasonable place for plays that are limited in appeal; but it is built in the main upon the great fallacy, fostered by many critics, who ought to know better, that drama, being a democratic art, ought to appeal to everybody or to nobody. Or perhaps it would be better to say that the machine merely takes advantage of that fallacy, for the prime reason it is conducted as it is, is frankly and defensibly because making every play a success in every theater is financially profitable. In its broad scheme of operation, it is a sound business interested in money income; the abuses of the system are, after all, matters of detail.

Radical critics insist that the machine is the curse of the American theater. It has curses enough, I very well know; but I do not know—and in this I am supported by the views of reputable authors and producers—that transplanting to America systems specifically adapted to utterly different economic conditions in Europe, will serve any better. The existing system is not wrong in principle; the drawbacks are

in its abuses—and one may say that about the Ten Commandments.³ If the machine is breaking down to-day it is doing so because it is not living up to its own original intention which was to provide all cities and towns in the chain with the identical productions successfully presented in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. On the one hand, there have never been enough good plays to supply continuously all the theaters of the United States; on the other, unscrupulous producers have taken advantage of the system to send out over it plays that failed in New York but that nevertheless have been heralded as successes, and "Number Two, Three, Four and Five" Companies all declared to be the original Broadway troupe. Thus they have broken faith with "the road" and thus they are helping, in trite but expressive phrase, to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.

However, it is not my purpose to enter here into a discussion of production ethics. I am at present concerned only with broad phases that most affect the playwright. It is his knowledge that every play is not adapted to the intellectual level of every audience, or to the prejudicial views of every audience. He knows that a drama's mighty success on Broadway does not in itself justify forcing it upon the attention of spectators in Oslo or Petrograd, and that probably, too, the local triumph is insufficient reason for foisting the play upon Minneapolis and St. Paul. He can see, moreover, that if he must write a drama that will appeal to audiences in all these cities, he must strike certain compromises in their favor.

Legitimately to play every theater in the chain, the production should meet the intellectual requirements of every audience there represented. It should not be above the mental level of any group, which means, of course, that it must be down to the level of the poorest. Hence it is that plays—like printed stories—that are hailed everywhere by the largest audiences, are almost invariably made of elemental

³ An interesting summary of conditions out of which the existing system grew is given by Alfred L. Bernheim in the dramatic section of *The New York Sunday Times*, March 25, 1928. Mr. Bernheim made his survey in great detail and over a long period for The Actors' Equity Association.

stuff treated in an elementary way.⁴ I think, without further treatment of this fact, that it now is clear that if a dramatist wants to show sophisticated life in his plays he must reconcile himself with the probability of a limited income, and that if he wants a large income he must not be exclusively "smart" and "clever."

To this the natural response of the very human reader will be that he wants to write plays that are not too sophisticated to make plenty of money. Fair enough. If he can write a good play and at the same time incorporate in it elements that will insure a wide public for it, so much the better. "What the playwright has to do," said Roi Cooper Megrue in his interview in *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* for March 26, 1916, "is to pull the two-dollar seat man a bit below the artistic level upon which he thinks he is perching, and at the same time to elevate the 25-cent seat man a little above his present conceptions of drama."

The universal play must first of all be intelligible to the wider public. There must be no great dependence upon odd customs difficult to understand. One such had at least something to do with the American failure of "The New Sin," by B. MacDonald Hastings. The plot of that play hinges upon the English custom of bequeathing an estate to the eldest surviving son; and the issue concerning this was made so much a matter of life and death that it was utterly unbelievable to audiences here who were not strict on that point of custom—if they observed it at all. The plot instance employed by the dramatist is therefore preferably a typical one. The legal phase of Tolstoy's "The Living Corpse" (or "The Man Who Was Dead" or "Redemption" as it was called in one American version), that a man must sin in order that his wife may obtain a divorce, was just as American as it was Russian. John M. Siddall, who in the last eight years of his active life brought *The American Magazine* from a circulation of 400,000 to two million under his editorship, always

⁴ "Intellectually the group is weak—emotionally it is powerful." Jane Ellen Harrison. "Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion," p. 43, Cambridge, 1912.

insisted convincingly that people in the mass desire only those things which they may interpret in terms of their own experience.

ELEMENTAL THEMES

LET us now inquire what is meant by an elemental theme. It will have to do with emotion, of course. It will be an emotion known to everybody. William James points out in his "Psychology" (p. 374), that "the varieties of emotion are innumerable," but that "anger, fear, love, hate, joy, grief, shame, pride, and their varieties may be called the coarser emotions, being coupled as they are with relatively strong bodily reverberations." These emotions are understood in all strata of life; they are so basic that even the lower animals understand them. "The subtler emotions," continues James, "are the moral, intellectual, and æsthetic feelings, and their bodily action is usually much less strong." These lesser feelings embrace, however, some of the notorious "seven deadly sins" that were popular subjects of plays in the middle ages and after, Avarice, Sloth, Gluttony, and Luxury—the others being Pride, Envy (which may be considered a variety of hate) and Ire (or anger). James, however, attaches little importance to lists of emotions because, in his authoritative opinion, emotion is not an independent entity, but must include the physical effect that goes before it plus the provoking circumstance that goes before that. Because the same provoking circumstances produce different physical effects in different individuals, who then, being individuals, react in infinitely varying ways with special modifications of emotion, he observes that such lists will be endless, can never be complete, and that no two will be the same. They will be just lists, he says; and he would as soon re-read those that he has laboriously waded through, as he would read a detailed description of the shapes of the stones on a New Hampshire farm.

James is speaking, of course, of the value of such lists to the study of psychology. Their compilation, even if they are not definitive or complete, may have some value to drama-

tists seeking suggestions of play ideas. Doubtless with this in mind, Moses Malevinsky provides in his "The Science of Playwriting" one catalogue of emotions in the abstract, and another as they seem to him represented in various well-known theatrical pieces. I will have something to say of this phase in the concluding chapter of this section.

It is inevitable that any one with a philosophical bent will think, at some period of his development, of the importance of listing for examination all the manifestations of man—if it can be done. As James says, the attempt has been made over and over again down the centuries. I attempted such a list a dozen years ago, but gave it up after prolonged experiment because I could not agree with myself from day to day on the family relationships of the emotions—where one sprang from or merged into another. My effort had an interesting premise, however; and that was the notion that in our present refinements of language, a word had been found for every shade of emotion. If one could classify the words, therefore, he would have an excellent basis for a system of philosophy. This, as I presently found out, had already been done by a certain Peter Mark Roget. In the forepages of Roget's celebrated "Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases—classified and arranged so as to facilitate the expression of ideas and assist in literary composition," a "Tabular Synopsis of Categories" achieved what I had had in mind.

A basic theme, whatever it may be, is always very much a matter of opinion. Malevinsky says that *melancholy* is the basic theme of "Hamlet," *madness* of "Justice," *planning* for "The Return of Peter Grimm." He no doubt had good reason for stating them so. Somebody else might have equally good reason for objecting. I can only try to say how one may look for a basic theme. An additional consideration is that what may be basic at one time may not be so at another. Without war as a recent national experience, probably neither "What Price Glory?" by Laurence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson, or "The Enemy," by Channing Pollock, would profit from a "basic" theme. Bayard Veiller's celebrated melodrama, "Within the Law," was greatly helped in its sensational character when it was originally produced in

New York, by a far-reaching scandal in the municipal Police Department.

There are certain themes so very basic that they are dangerous to treat—boils on civilization, one might call them, suffering for attention and yet too frightfully tender to touch. There are dramatists who do treat these social sores, but they do so not especially at their own risk, but at the far graver peril to the public at large that is too poorly poised ever to withstand much excitement. Brieux is the brave example; but Brieux is in a class by himself. Brieux, before taking up his scalpels, made sure that he knew what he was talking about, and by virtue of his manly utterances, was taken into the French Academy.

A dramatist is told to pick basic themes, and yet is strictly forbidden to write on religion, on race hatreds, on capital and labor, and other undeniably vital matters; but this, I think, is mainly because it is unlikely, when so many great minds have failed to solve the explosive problems there represented, that he will succeed in sowing flowers on the battlefields. He probably will just stir up the malcontents. That, indeed, is what is usually done under the guise of "constructiveness." The war play calls itself patriotic by hurling epithets at the enemy; the peace play demands to be known as a great civilizing force because it utters platitudes about heaven and fraternity and family ties and wheels of industry—but both instances find their real places in public estimation not by efficacy of their arguments but by what the public wants to believe about them at that time.

THE POWER OF "LOVE"

IN MALEVINSKY's careful opinion the great success of "Abie's Irish Rose," by Anne Nichols, that seeming anomaly among plays that endured into its sixth year in the heart of New York's theater district, is based primarily on the fact that it contains "nine forms of love, the greatest elemental emotion of mankind."⁵ On the other hand, it has been stated in many quarters that "Abie's Irish Rose" is one of the most

⁵ "The Science of Playwriting," p. 100.

undeniable contributions to hate that ever has been presented back of the footlights. Almost the entire action, these radicals contend, consists of abuse hurled back and forth between the Irish and the Jews; and although the ending shows something akin to a Christmas party in a Jewish household, it is alleged that this is altogether arbitrary, and by no means undoes the mischief previously evoked. My inclination is to agree with Malevinsky, for to correct an evil such as race hatred, it is rather imperative that it shall first be brought into the open where the finer force of love can attack it and break it down; but my point here is only to show how opinions about basic themes do differ.

Barrett Clark, in his "Study of the Modern Drama" (p. 138), notes the firm opinion of the French dramatist, Maurice Donnay, that, "A play is a love-story." Augustus Thomas justifies his belief in love as a basic theme in an interesting way. Along about the close of the first decade of the present century he privately announced his findings in this regard, and a few years later published them—I believe in a preface to one of his plays. He used to begin by drawing a triangle on a blackboard. The wide base line represented the broadest form of love; the apex the narrowest. Several gradually diminishing varieties came between. The base, said Thomas in substance, represents self-preservation, or love of one's self. Next comes reproduction, or sexual love. Third is love of kin. This includes parental love, which is not reciprocated by the child, but is passed along to his own children. Then, if I recall correctly, comes love of one's neighbor, which includes friendship; then patriotism, love of one's country, and finally altruism, or love of humanity.

This is all very suggestive; but it also necessarily is not final. I am unfortunately unable, like the rest of mankind, to substitute anything that is more final; but I would like to remark that a distinction may profitably be made between emotions and instincts, and this despite the fact that until now I have been following popular usage in merging them. They have much in common; yet there is a difference—expressed by James in this way: "An emotion is a tendency to feel, and an instinct is a tendency to act, characteristically, when

in presence of a certain object in the environment.”⁶ I have no desire to enter into a quibbling discussion over words; but it would seem that instincts may be more basic in human nature generally, than emotions, and that a dramatist seeking a vital theme might do better to consider instincts first.

SOFT MUSIC ON BIG DRUMS

THERE is no doubt that to stir the public deeply the artist must resort to powerful means; and the most powerful means are, of course, those that excite the most wracking emotions. I personally enjoy delicate character etchings where the delight of contemplation is mostly intellectual; and I therefore whole-heartedly give them place in the playmaking scheme; but the fact remains that the great plays of the world are those that are conceived around fundamental human passions. Moreover, strange as it may seem, those are the plays also in which character analysis is most profound. The incomparable Hamlet occurs in the frame of an almost blood-and-thunder melodrama—Faust in the machinery of hocus-pocus and a compact with the devil; and both plays are the more effective for being so. The soundest general method, therefore, would seem to be to make the story vital and compelling, with subtler beauties of writing occurring as they do in life, as varieties of elemental emotions, or as graceful branches on a sturdy trunk that is seen clearly to support them.

I do not say this on grounds of expediency. Pleasures of heart and mind may be reconciled. Such reconciliation is precisely of what life itself consists. Man actually derives his gentleness out of the coarseness of existence.⁷ The æsthete is not barred from his pleasure in the theater because the drama he sees is not wholly composed of sophisticated quibbles. He is human, too; and he can look contemptuously askance at the coarse guffaws and ready tears of the mob only when the play is insincere and they, unlike him, are too

⁶ “Psychology,” p. 373.

⁷ It was Herbert Spencer’s formula that, “life is the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations.”

naïve to see that they are tricked. When the bids to emotion are sincere, he must yield to them, also; and because the channels of his dryer heart are traversed less frequently, the violence of attack must be correspondingly greater for him. The overtones of the play that he appreciates more than his neighbors are quite properly mere extra pleasures; they are not all the pleasure there is. Misunderstanding this has ruined many a good dramatist. He thinks of a play as wholly coarse or wholly fine, when it should really be coarse *and* fine. It was the ideal of Leonid Andreyev, so I have heard, to write tragedies over which Schopenhauer and his cook could weep together; and on the whole I am disposed to think it was as healthy an ideal as any artist could have in the theater.

If we consider what the public wants—and what else is this chapter for?—we must next, or in all events very soon, inquire whether people go to the theater to see their own lives reflected, or to be lifted out of them. However the dramatist's inclination may be, the answer will be overwhelmingly that people want to be taken out of themselves.⁸ This does not necessarily mean that they require fantastic plays, but that they want any play to give them the pleasure of a different light on the subject than they are accustomed to seeing. There is a probably apocryphal story to the effect that when Denman Thompson once took "The Old Homestead" to Keene, New Hampshire, not far from Swanzey where the scene of the famous old melodrama was laid, his audiences wanted their money back on the ground that they could see scenes like that in their own neighborhood any day.⁹ I doubt this particular tale because "The Old Homestead" has a moving, vital theme that would have engrossed the country folk surely enough, especially because it was given in their

⁸ "Do you read a book or go to the theater in order to escape from life, to forget your sorrows?" asks Barrett Clark in "Oedipus or Pollyanna" (Seattle, 1927). "Golly, what a life you must lead! Personally I read books and go to the theater for more and ever more of life. I for one don't know anything more fascinating than mankind; having only one life to live I know I can't possible crowd very much actual experience into it, but I can enjoy other people's experiences."

⁹ Laurence Hutton, "Curiosities of the American Stage," New York, 1891, p. 44.

own terms; but it does point to a serious defect from which many plays suffer. A play that merely photographs the commonplace can only be just that. At the same time, it must be remembered that merely transferring the commonplace from real life to the stage frequently places it in such a conspicuously detached position that the audience sees it thereby differently than ever before, and thrills to it.

It is human enough to want the unusual. When Trinculo, in Shakespeare's "The Tempest," first sees the fearful Caliban, lying upon the ground, he ponders that, "Were I in England now (as once I was), and had but this fish painted, not a holiday-fool there but would give a piece of silver: there would this monster make a man; any strange beast there makes a man: when they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian."¹⁰ The nine days' wonder will always attract the crowd, no matter how the learned may scoff; and in truth, when one thinks of it, it ought to take something pretty unusual and worth making a fuss over, to gather eight hundred or a thousand (or more) persons in one place, as the playwright hopes to do at every performance. I think it was H. G. Wells who once said that the recipe for a popular novel was to kill a baby in it.

It is for the dramatist to determine just how sensational he wants to make his appeal. Barrie takes the whimsical slant in the court case of a charming woman who kills a man in a railway compartment because he insists on subjecting her to cold by having the window open, and gives us "The Legend of Leonora;" Shaw conceives the notion of a surgeon, in love with his patient's wife, given the tempting opportunity to let the patient die on his operating table, and produces "The Doctor's Dilemma;" Sutton Vane sees Charon's boat on the River Styx as a modern ocean steamship traveling hither and yon, and startles audiences with "Outward Bound." Other dramatists, with less discernment,

¹⁰ Shakespeare took many a pot-shot at public demand for sensational novel-ties. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Act V, Sc. 1, he has Theseus dismiss "The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals tearing the Thracian singer in their rage," as, "an old device; and it was played when I from Thebes came last a conqueror."

seize upon the proved sensations of the hour and turn them into plays. "Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street," who on the stage kills his victims and disposes of them in the form of mutton pies, was a real criminal years ago in England. The Tichborne Claimant has seen the foot-lights in a dozen versions. In Shakespeare's day scarcely one outstanding crime was missed as a chance in the theater to prolong the morbid interest of the public; and even in this supposedly advanced day the same grist for the newspapers serves dramatic art. But the whole procedure is reasonably based on the earnest desire to give the great public something worth coming to see.

We are talking now of choosing a basic theme from which delicate things will naturally evolve. This is very different from the common procedure which is first to find what the great public wants and then to put the factors in, like plums in a pudding, with no respect to the kind of pudding it is. In that difference lies the colossal mistake of the producers and distributors of American motion pictures who cannot understand why many films that conform with their formula, do not succeed everywhere. The elements, in most of those cases, have no real relation to the underlying stories. I recall a screen version of Maurice Leblanc's Arsene Lupin story, "The Teeth of the Tiger," which contains one of the cleverest detective-mystery plot mechanisms ever devised, that was made stupid and utterly devoid of its proper interest by being rehashed and decked out in this arbitrary, mistaken manner.

THE PUBLIC BE PLEASED

BUT with that danger indicated, it will be valuable to inquire what the formula is, or, in all events, to study out a formula that will be as instructive. The conventional formula will include a great many things that have been discussed in earlier pages, such as the happy ending. There will be novelty, timeliness, acting opportunity, entertainment, laughter and tears, love scenes and thrills, pretty girls, handsome men, luxury, scenic variety, costume changes, latest fashions, mob scenes, speed and probably a good fist-fight. The play must

be "different" and plausible. This recipe will vary in the offices of different producing managers as they consult their own views of "what the public wants."

Charles B. Dillingham, who in the first quarter of the present century produced some two hundred plays and managed about twenty important theaters, found this formula in the metropolitan daily newspaper, which he pointed out contained something for everybody. He was very shrewd in this, and many notable successes proved the soundness of his judgment. It was in emulation of the daily newspaper that Mack Sennett first found his formula for his famous motion picture comedies—the same in which Charlie Chaplin arose to stardom. The "Keystone cops" and the bathing beauties were all in the newspapers first. So examine the organization of a leading daily for yourself—especially the evening paper which is designed to enter the home circle. Observe not only its departments of news, of something for the children, for mothers, for fathers, fashions, humor, literature, stocks and bonds, editorial comment, comics and the rest, but consider how much of the issue is apportioned to each. The result must be illuminating to you in shaping that popular play that you are about to write, or that you even may be writing now.

CHAPTER XLII

THE INVENTION OF PLOTS

ONE hears so much about authors gettings ideas out of the newspapers that it is very easy to overestimate the importance of that source. The fact is that the play idea coming that way derives its value almost invariably from the peculiar personal slant of the person who sees it and not from the form and character of the printed words. Rita Weiman followed with casual interest the newspaper accounts of a notorious murder trial a few years back and then suddenly saw a play in it. Did the rest of the public see what she saw? No, not then: because her inspiration pointed to the time after the sensation had ended and the press had switched its big news to something else. The public was no longer interested in a trial that had been successfully withstood; but Miss Weiman had begun to wonder if the domestic affairs of the accused man would be settled as completely as public matters in the court-room had been. The result was a powerful and successful play, "The Acquittal."

When I began to study playwriting I seemed to see reams of ideas in any issue of any newspaper. I snipped out paragraphs and columns at every opportunity; and at the end of a year or so I had two fat scrap-books bulging with clippings. The sequel now is that in nearly twenty years I have not made use of one item there contained; and day before yesterday I burned the useless litter to ashes. On the other hand, my accumulation of loose notes in a couple of old filing-boxes is rich in suggestion. The reason is that I jotted down there not facts but my thoughts about facts.

NOTE-TAKING

MOST playwrights keep notes of one kind or another. In this present volume the illustration showing Owen Davis's original memorandum for his play "The Shotgun Wedding" is reproduced from a page that he tore for the purpose from his rough notebook. In George Arliss's autobiography, "Up From Bloomsbury," one may read in passing, how he found his play vehicle, "Pagannini," in rummaging through notes collected for possible dramatization by Edward Knoblock. Jerome A. Hart, in his book, "Sardou and the Sardou Plays" (Philadelphia, 1913), relates that at the death of that remarkable craftsman there were found hundreds of *dossiers*, or filing-cases containing material that in "the older ones had been worked up into plays, while the newer ones were merely raw material for future dramas." Belasco to-day possesses reams of notes for plays that may never see the footlights.

Instances of this sort might be multiplied indefinitely if they were at all needed to bulwark the obvious point that a playwright is as wise in jotting down ideas when he has them, irrespective of whether he has immediate need of them or not, as a squirrel is in storing nuts anent the coming winter. At the same time he may be cautioned not to be too saving. Oliver Wendell Holmes once remarked (in "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," I think) the wisdom of using good ideas now, of not withholding them for a better time, because, he said, by keeping the mental channels active and open, better and better ideas would be certain to flow when they were needed. So jot down your snatches of scenes as soon as they come to you, with no thought of how you are going to fit them in. Capture the fancy while it flies; you can do the cold work of dovetailing later.

Play ideas rarely come out of life in the raw as complete events. There is virtually always something fundamental to be supplied. Still, sometimes the newspaper report written colorlessly in terms of sober fact, so narrowly misses being a complete plot that the dramatist who reads it catches his breath and prays that he alone may be the one to profit from

it. And yet, as time goes on, the dramatist finds that apparently no one else saw what he saw.

The average newspaper play idea is fairly represented in the story of "a soldier called Chanron, first name unknown," who was mentioned in the dispatches from Paris early in the World War. When hostilities began Chanron was in Brussels. Taken prisoner by the invading Germans he was sentenced to death. He escaped and fled to Holland. From Rotterdam, in August, 1915, he sent a letter to the French Minister of the Interior in which he stated that as a patriot he felt it his duty to communicate to his government certain secret information that he had obtained, chiefly that one Bolo Pacha, esteemed in Paris, was in reality an important head of the German espionage system who had succeeded in buying over numerous high French Government officials. Subsequent efforts to root out a widely organized disloyalty in France, gave Chanron's charges a great appearance of truth. Bolo Pacha was said to have received a large sum of money from Von Bernstoff, German ambassador to America; a former Prime Minister was cast into prison, the Minister of the Interior in question was banished, two prominent French editors were shot and a third forestalled investigation by committing suicide. As for the patriotic Chanron, arriving at his native frontier at about the time his letter was being read by the Minister of the Interior, he was immediately denounced as a spy and thrown into prison. He languished there one year; and while his charges were either ignored or completely suppressed, the nefarious operations of the great ring of official corruption—if there was such a ring—went on.

Now here surely is a dramatic situation that in detail is also suggestive of many elements heretofore described as valuable ingredients for a universal play. The essential truth of the facts does not especially matter from the playwright's point of view. If they cannot be sustained, or it is not expedient to validate them, the situation as he sees it can be made to occur, for instance, in one of those mythical Balkan countries to which Anthony Hope blazed the trail in "The Prisoner of Zenda" and George Barr McCutcheon in "Graustark"—or, if the playwright sees no value in the official at-

mosphere, he may prefer to use it as a scandalous plot in private life.

FILLING ORDERS

WHETHER the Chanron story is a good plot or not, it certainly is a rich beginning—rich enough to be quite unusual. The dramatist cannot always wait, however, for the discovery of such a placer mine; he has to dig deeper. The desired accomplishment is to be able “to invent a plot out of thin air.” Nor is this ambition a matter of vanity; it has its practical ends. When stage opportunity first knocked for me, it was not to demand anything that I had written or for which I had particular material ready gathered. A vaudeville producer, of straitened means, asked me to write the text of a musical sketch around two stage settings that he had purchased at a great, irresistible bargain. One was a full-stage representation of a Japanese tea-house, and the other was a simple drop showing the deck of a steamship. With this scant and puzzling inspiration I wrote an offering of which I am not proud, but which must have served its purpose because it played for many seasons and for a time simultaneously in four companies.

In that same cold-blooded fashion established dramatists receive their orders for plays. The eminent star, Miss Dolores Divine, having just “flopped” in the world’s greatest drama, “Crackers and Milk,” is still under contract at a preposterous salary, and must have a vehicle if her manager is not to go bankrupt. Miss Divine has a talent for blood-curdling laughter, is especially fetching in riding-togs, “dies with great effectiveness” and has a superb back—not to forget an entirely useless husband who must be included in the cast. The unhappy dramatist must duly provide for all these things, and perhaps at the same time salvage what he can of the now useless scenery for “Crackers and Milk.”

Don’t let the dramatist be too sure that this is beneath his dignity, that such hack work is degrading. The greatest dramatists of all time have not been above accepting practical limitations, even handicaps so painfully practical as these; and I venture to think that the more of them the

5

Jim *in the lady fellow. How's*
 Yes, that's my luck! ~~Always.~~ *you guess? So I*
~~Purser~~ *Boats Officer* *like like had*
 Will you come to the Purser's office? *look?*

Jim
 What's the matter? Is the rent due already?

~~Purser~~ *B.O.*
 No, sir. But a cabin boy discovered a thief in your cabin.

Jim (Angry) *Tom (with suspicion!)*
 Why, can't ~~you~~ *keep out of my cabin.*

Purser
 That's what we will find out. The boy refuses to talk.

Tom *(Believed!)*
 So it was a boy?

Purser
 Dressed like a clown. He's a great mystery. Will you come, sir?
 He says he knows you ~~this way sir!~~ *(Exit)*

Lucile (Enters)
 Oh, Tom, they've found the cutest little stowaway! The officers are threatening to put him in a cell on bread and ~~water.~~ *star.* A lot of people are taking up a purse to pay for his passage, will you help?

Tom
 I don't believe in encouraging stowaways. He'll deserve whatever punishment they mean to give him. *B.G. says so!*

Jim
 But there are stowaways and stowaways! Maybe this one -- here I've got a dime that isn't working.

Marcia
 I'll give ten dollars. Tom, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Jim *He will be! yes indeed! He'll*
~~be ashamed of himself -- so he will be!~~ *be most paid!*

Marcia
 The best seems to be full of stowaways! What did you do with yours?

Matilda
 I've ~~given him~~ *the kernel with Carlo.*

A BOY *Will B.G. make difference! (Exit).*
 We've raised the kid's passage. She's promised to earn it by doing stunts for us.

Tom
 She? (He stares at Jim and looks at zither)
(Lucile starts to play "Sunny" softly)

Courtesy of the Author

FROM OTTO HARBACH'S ORIGINAL MS. OF "SUNNY"

Otto Harbach began his career as a professor of English. Newspaper and advertising work brought him to Broadway where he is known as a consistently successful dramatist. It is an interesting fact that he has done most of his work "to order." Plays bearing his name are mostly musical. They range all the way from "The Crinoline Girl" for Julian Eltinge, the female impersonator, to "Kid Boots" for Eddie Cantor. His name appears also on "Madame Sherry," "The Fascinating Widow," "High Jinks," "Katinka," "A Pair of Queens," "Rose Marie," "No, No, Nanette" and many more.

playwright successfully meets, the better job he will do when he comes to that high estate where he may do as he pleases. I have watched with especial interest the motion picture career of C. Gardner Sullivan, who unquestionably is one of the greatest writers that the screen has developed; and all through that career he has voluntarily and unfailingly observed the economies demanded by commercial studios that employed him. It was Sullivan who fitted many of the most important film stars with the types of vehicle that carried them best—that even, in a number of instances, made them stars; and yet so soundly made were those vehicles, that many of them have been reproduced for the stars of a later period.

I once asked Sullivan pointblank about his mental approach to the problem of fitting a featured player suddenly placed under contract. He is said, for example, to have written the original story and scenario of "The Bugle Call," for Willie Collier, Jr., in about twenty-four hours; and "The Bugle Call," now twice produced, is considered one of the screen's best boy stories. But Sullivan, like most authors who are not especially introspective, couldn't explain it very well. He just attributed his "knack" to his training as a newspaper man, where he had acquired "the nose for news," the appreciation of "human interest" and the ability to get out a story in time for an edition.

Ideas, suggested by outside facts, require approaches just as varied as those facts vary. A writer confronted with the story of Chanron obviously would go to work differently than he would if he were trying to develop an idea from a theme. Willard Mack apparently writes from specific "situations" that have come to him from the outside and have then been "worked up;" Porter Emerson Browne, in the period of his plays "A Fool There Was" and "The Spendthrift," so evidently started with general themes like "Honesty is the best policy" and "Waste not, want not," that he was accused of dramatizing the copy-book, although when he wrote "The Bad Man," in which Holbrook Blinn appeared years later, he very easily proved his ability to view life from a personal, delightful angle. Besides that, starting from a theme requires more labor.

CONSTRUCTIVE THINKING

SULLIVAN apparently works with equal facility whether he starts from a theme or from a situation; but so definite is the relationship of cause and effect in his completed work that one can imagine rather clearly just how his mind probably developed it. Taking his Dorothy Dalton play, "Love Me," as an example (although this probably is one of his least admirable efforts), one may suppose that he began by fixing upon the general idea for the star, of a girl who wanted to be loved. For all I know, Thomas H. Ince, the studio head, may have started it by saying, "Sullivan, I want the public to love Miss Dalton!" The best setting for that character obviously would be a situation in which she was not loved—where she was even hated. Why would she persist in such a hostile atmosphere? To be near some one she cared for. So Sullivan presently arrived (one may suppose) at the not especially original thought of a girl-wife unwelcome in her husband's family. His thinking went on. The antagonism should be all on their side. She was not to fight back. In her lovable, gentle nature, she was incapable of that; but, necessarily active, she could make every effort to win them without being unpleasant. How? Well, by doing them a service for which they would be eternally grateful, for which they would love her. It had to be a great deed. The biggest favor she could do would be to preserve for them what they treasured most. What would that be? Their pride—their respectability, the very thing that barred her from their love.

Respectability threatened meant an impending scandal. This scandal could not involve her husband or cleaving to him would win her only the audience's contempt. He must remain upright. So Sullivan provided a sister for the husband. This sister planned an elopement. An elopement alone would be mild. To make it a real scandal the sister might have intended to run off with a married man. But no. There would then have to be an accounting of the married man's wife, which would be another story. Much better to have the sister married; but that there wouldn't be too much

story complication involved, let her husband be away somewhere—a naval officer—off in the service of his country, which would make possible scandal even worse. Up to this stage Sullivan had the impending scandal and the intention of having his heroine act to prevent it. How could she do that? Why, by leading the others to believe that she was the guilty woman, the one really about to elope.

There is no point in following out the other ramifications of this idea, because the purpose is merely to show how reasoning back and forth will build up a plot. One cannot tell, of course, precisely where the dramatist actually began. Sullivan may have started the foregoing, hypothetical chain of reasoning, with the scandal occurring in a respectable family; I only suppose him to have started with the unloved girl idea because he was confronted with the specific problem of providing Miss Dalton with a vehicle. He may even have had some other phase of the situation jotted down in his notes awaiting an emergency order such as then arose.

The illustration, accurate or not, brings out the mental working habit of the trained dramatist which is first to determine the kind of complication he needs to supplement his original idea, and then to go after it by letting his fancy play with possibilities. This trick of considering possibilities often, in itself, leads to discovery of original plots. The writer asks himself what *might be* the result if this everyday event *did not* occur according to schedule. In such speculation he sometimes stumbles upon amazingly useful ideas. W. S. Gilbert consciously or unconsciously arrived at many of his most delightful absurdities just by carrying through to their ridiculous ends various lines of procedure that life ordinarily abandons midway.

But let no author be too sure that he is original. Many a dramatist has become known for writing only one story over and over again, although he doubtless was as much surprised as anyone to hear about it, for he had different names and locations and the villain was in a different line of business. Originality lies deeper. That kind of dramatist has mistaken the movement of a single successful plot for a universal formula.

SUGGESTIVENESS OF WRONG SURROUNDINGS

It is not only getting an interesting idea: it is also making that idea dramatic. In this connection we know that opposition is a rather useful quality to establish. An instance was just given in the suggested building of Sullivan's "Love Me," when the girl who wanted to be loved was at once placed into surroundings where she was hated. Once opposition is established for the germ of a dramatic idea, it soon sets up a kind of turmoil out of which the keen-eyed dramatist picks many riches. It is therefore not such a bad plan when contemplating an interesting character who is the soul of generosity, let us say, to think of what he might do when surrounded with selfishness. Some such reasoning probably gave Galsworthy his situation in "The Pigeon." Similarly, Edgar Selwyn placed his simple, lovable old inventor in "The Country Boy," in the claws of an unscrupulous swindler—from whom he had to be rescued (with his lovely daughter) by the hero.

But adverse surroundings are not always to be found off-hand. Frequently the character arrives on the dramatist's horizon just because he is picturesque—not because he is any one outstanding thing. Suppose we are drawn to the possibilities of a character who is just a witty vagabond—a tramp with a compelling philosophy. What ready opposition is there for him? Yet, by feeling around mentally, one gradually sees that there *is* a place for him. Because we have not found it all at once is because we have not clearly apprehended his nature. Once we know him for his keynote, then we can also place our fingers unerringly on the opposition that will unfold and develop him. We think about him. What is he? What is Cyrano? A lover of beauty excluded from beautiful life by his own physical ugliness. Yet there is a triumph for Cyrano. His fine sense impels him to sacrifice himself that beauty shall mate with beauty; but at the end his own nature defeats him; the revelation of his soul, despite his effort to hide it, proves that he himself is the beautiful one because beauty lies ultimately not in body but in character. Philosophizing of this kind, as sketchy and hap-

hazard as it may be, inevitably will lead the thinker into the realm of action stories.

In the preceding chapter I mentioned having been impressed, at one time, with the fact that there is a word to express virtually every shade of emotion, and that if one could classify those words he would have an excellent starting-point for a great philosophy. Roget's "Thesaurus" was named as a convenient attempt along that line. In the present place it may be observed that Roget has tried to classify not emotions alone, but, as he himself says in his preface, *ideas*. In his arrangement he has endeavored, whenever possible, to place correlative and opposite ideas in parallel columns. There *truth* is juxtaposed with *error*; *scholar* with *ignoramus*. The "Thesaurus" thus is a striking illustration of the habit of mind that evolves dramatic ideas through suggested opposition. Any dictionary of synonyms and antonyms probably would be as useful. But it is Roget who points out clearly that the person seeking an opposite idea frequently has a considerable range from which to choose. Circumstances alter cases. Without worrying about the philosophy, however, the dramatist can get out of such general thinking a series of fresh impulses that will evoke his personal background of associated ideas. That is valuable.

Another printed work that curiously suggests and stimulates the dramatist's habit of mind in process of invention, is Arthur Schopenhauer's famous essay, "The Art of Controversy."¹ The great philosopher there inquires into the nature of opposition and into the many forms that the contending sides take in meeting specific attacks—directions for plot and counterplot, in other words.

Still another form of inventive thinking is indicated in earlier pages of this present book. The briefest possible statement of a truly dramatic action is a proposition. Each piece of material collected by the dramatist ordinarily would make just one of the three clauses of a proposition. Determining which clause that is, and then setting out to find the other two, is obviously an excellent way. Do you understand the individual clauses of a proposition so well that from

¹ Printed in English translation in many different editions.

any one of them alone you can provide fitting complements? If so, you are able to "invent" plays.

All of these approaches form and strengthen the habit of mind that "invents" play ideas; and I would call the subject closed but for the fact that I have not yet referred to one curious work that is also interesting and provocative. It is that book of Georges Polti called "The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations," which purports, as its title implies, to classify all possible dramatic structures in that many cubby-holes.²

SPECULATIONS OF POLTI

THE reader will want to peruse Polti's book for himself; but just to give an inkling of it, I quote here the broad divisions that he details ingeniously in his own pages. He starts from the premise that there are but thirty-six emotions. His corresponding thirty-six situations are these: (1) Supplication; (2) Deliverance; (3) Crime pursued by vengeance; (4) Vengeance taken for kindred upon kindred; (5) Pursuit; (6) Disaster; (7) Falling prey to cruelty or misfortune; (8) Revolt; (9) Daring enterprise; (10) Abduction; (11) The enigma; (12) Obtaining; (13) Enmity of kinsmen; (14) Rivalry of kinsmen; (15) Murderous adultery; (16) Madness; (17) Fatal imprudence; (18) Involuntary crimes of love; (19) Slaying of a kinsman unrecognized; (20) Self-sacrifice for an ideal; (21) Self-sacrifice for kindred; (22) Self-sacrifice for a passion; (23) Necessity of sacrificing loved ones; (24) Rivalry of superior and inferior; (25) Adultery; (26) Crimes of love; (27) Discovery of dishonor of a loved one; (28) Obstacles to love; (29) An enemy loved; (30) Ambition; (31) Conflict with a god; (32) Mistaken jealousy; (33) Erroneous judgment; (34) Remorse; (35) Recovery of a lost one; and (36) Loss of loved ones. In following out his philosophy that amplifies this scheme, M. Polti cites about 1,200 examples of which approximately a thousand are taken from well-known stage plays of all periods.

M. Polti mentions the interesting precedent set him by his

² Translated by Lucile Ray, Ridgewood, N. J., 1917.

countryman Gérard de Neval, who found twenty-four basic situations, and the more celebrated effort of Count Carlo Gozzi, nearly a century and a half earlier, that he says also grouped thirty-six. He implies that Goethe and Schiller subscribed to Gozzi's scheme. But in Goethe's "Conversations" (for the year 1830), it is said: "Goethe then talked of Gozzi, and the theatre at Venice, where the actors had merely subjects given them, and filled up the details impromptu. Gozzi said there were only six-and-thirty tragic situations. Schiller thought there were many more, but could never succeed in finding even so many."

It is observable that Gozzi, according to Goethe, confined his number to *tragic* situations, and that Schiller was so far from agreeing with the number that he tried to find more without being able to find as much. As to what Gozzi actually said about it, my own reading unfortunately leaves me pretty much in the dark. The only illuminating reference that I have been able to find in English is a casual remark by J. A. Symonds, accompanying his translation of Gozzi's "Memoirs," that, "Gozzi, writing in the 18th century, calculates that there may have been from *three hundred to four hundred* dramatic situations." The footnote to this refers the reader to the "Ragionamento Ingenuo" and "Appendice," Op. 1772, Vols. I and IV.³ However, further search for that, while interesting, would be scarcely valuable.

Polti might have gone still further back into history and recalled one Hermogenes, of the second century, A. D., known in the field of criticism as "the hairy-hearted" and "Master of the Progymnasmata," who wrote an "art of poetry" in which there were chapters on "Invention," "Ideas," and "Cleverness of Method." These intriguing chapter-heads indicated, so it seems, mere classifications like Polti's, and really did not, despite their undoubted honesty of intention, uncover secrets of original composition.⁴ An

³ "The Memoirs of Count Carlo Gozzi," translated and edited by J. A. Symonds, with essays by the translator on Italian impromptu comedy, Gozzi's life, the Dramatic Fables, and Pietro Longhi. London, 1890, 2 vols. The note in question is in Vol. I, p. 56.

⁴ George Saintsbury, "A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe," New York, 1908. Vol. I, p. 97f.

even more suggestive work is William Whewell's celebrated "Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences" (1840), in which the author endeavors to follow Bacon's plan for an effectual art of discovery. I mention these facts not for the purpose of discrediting M. Polti's contribution, which is highly intelligent and suggestive, but just to show that classifications of this kind, like classifications of emotions, represent after all, mere points of view that, as James says, are all right and all different.⁵

However, the dramatist need not be concerned with the psychological soundness of such lists as long as they provoke and stimulate his constructive imagination. He need only keep in the back of his mind the knowledge that such lists are not final; but within their limits he may find them essentially valuable as working instruments.

⁵ M. Polti announced before the World War, his intention of writing another book entitled, "The Laws of Literary Invention." I do not know whether or not this has been accomplished. A half-dozen years before his announcement, some scholastic inventor in one of the college towns of New England demonstrated a machine that actually produced plots by the mere turning of a crank. Assuming that all plots are basically contrived as one would build a sentence, he had each element represented by a series of words on the rim of a wheel. The independent turning of these wheels presented a great variety of plot combinations. It was highly ingenious, to say the least. There have been other machines of the same sort, one celebrated one being devoted to the composition of Latin hexameters.



CHAPTER XLIII

EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF

THE perfect playmaking method would be, I suppose, one in which the plays would write themselves; but unfortunately it is still necessary for the dramatist to make some effort. Although this exertion ought to be the veriest matter of course, human nature makes it as formidable as a mountain—for, truth to tell, only a few misguided persons like to work. There is, it is true, a state of madness that is called the joy of work. In close examination, however, this is found to exist only after the artist has become wound up, so to speak, and is thrilled by his own momentum. To prove that this is true just snap him out of it, and see what a time he will have getting back into the spirit. I know for my own part, that after I have been away from my play for awhile—a day or so—I find much difficulty in getting back. I have to get warmed up again, after which things move rapidly. The inspiration to be derived from such momentum is much the same as what the audience derives from the spell of the theater. It explains, moreover, why writing detached scenes, helter-skelter through the play, is rarely satisfactory as a method.

THE FINE ART OF DODGING WORK

WILLIAM J. LOCKE once confessed that during his writing jobs he kept looking out of his second floor study window for good excuses to come downstairs. A tradesman delivering goods was a positive benefactor—provided the rest of the family didn't see him first—and there were other useful subterfuges that I cannot now recall. Locke is, of course, a novel-

ist; but novelists have no corner in this faculty. It has become rather notorious in the Broadway district that if a manager wants a play from an author under contract, the only way he can get it on schedule time is to coax the dramatist down to Atlantic City on pretext of giving him a much-needed vacation, lock him in a hotel room and not let him out in any circumstances until he has delivered a completed script. Probably a good two-thirds of all the plays that are produced have been committed to paper in a state of panic at the last moment. A persistent story has it that when Eugene Walter had not delivered the third act of "Paid in Full," one of the partners who eventually produced it, Wagenhals and Kemper, locked him in an outbuilding on a Long Island farm and thus obtained the act several hours later.

The dramatist suddenly acquires a new play idea. He works at it feverishly for a day or two. Then the vein runs out. With no rapid progress to encourage him, he puts the work by, utterly ignoring the Rotary Club's admonition to "Do It Now" and Ben Franklin's or Somebody Else's advice not to put off until to-morrow what you can do to-day. There it gathers dust until his wife starts to throw it out. Shrieking with horror he prevents this vandalism. "But it's of no value, Caspar," she says. "It's been lying there for months; and I know you don't want it because I've seen you put your feet on it two or three times." Thus it comes back to his attention; and in trying to persuade himself that his indignation is just, he gains a fresh slant on the old idea and it comes to life again. In this incident Caspar is not making history. He is just proving once more that all men, even geniuses, are procrastinating, lazy, shiftless creatures who prefer luxurious satisfaction to service. The long-sustained labor of playmaking is a pleasant task only in a few spots; most of it is precious hard work.

Most of the accounts of what are popularly called "habits of work" of literary men are in reality notes of what literary men do to humor themselves into industry. Goethe, visiting Schiller one day, found his friend's study empty, and noticing a most unpleasant odor thereabouts, investigated and found a drawer full of rotten apples. Schiller's wife told him that the

drawer was always filled with them "because the scent was beneficial to Schiller, and he could not live or work without it."¹ A number of other illustrations, perhaps not as extreme as this, are cited in Isaac D'Israeli's "Curiosities of Literature." The fact is that there is no real magic in any of these weird practices. What the eccentric author is doing is demolishing his own excuses for inaction, whipping himself to distasteful labor; and the way he goes about this has no especial significance in itself. Overcoming inertia is the difficult thing—but not in playmaking alone. Saint-Simon, founder of French socialism, had his valet awaken him each morning with the words, "Remember, monsieur le comte, that you have great things to do!" Publishers know how this is. That is why they never chain authors to desks in their offices. The spectacle usually presented by the authors in fiddling away time, then in spasmodic fits of industry, and next in the other evidences that any writer will recognize if he is frank with himself, would demoralize any business organization.

"The Muses dwell," said Aristotle, "in the souls of those who love work." The sooner an author decides that hard work is inevitable in producing anything worth while, the sooner he will give up all this trifling. Resignation to labor will be doubly hard if he has been used to living on manna from heaven—unexpected help from relatives and friends in paying his bills, or "windfalls" from unanticipated side-jobs. Things like that cultivate the Micawber habit of "waiting for something to turn up" and defer regular, conscientious devotion to duty. The dramatist must be stern with himself. He must assume responsibility whether he has it or not. The work of writing plays is writing plays. If it's only a matter of what people will think of him for not producing results, he must prove that he really does deliver.

"In the drama, even more than in the novel," said Hartley Manners in his interview in *The New York Press*, "a congenital lack of genius or talent will in the end succumb to the attack of hard work. That is because the art form of the drama is the most difficult to acquire, the most uncertain, the

¹ "Conversations of Goethe," Oct. 7, 1827.

most subtle, and the most complex of all art forms. Therefore the man who learns this art form well by hard work and has ease and fluidity in his use of technique often will be applauded just on the strength of his knowledge, quite independent of the vigor of his ideas or the moral and human importance of his message. But at the same time I don't honestly advise an indefatigable worker with no ideas to turn to drama as a sure means of livelihood. Without both ideas and energy the drama is the most uncertain field a man could pick out to enter."

HOURS OF LABOR

SIR WALTER SCOTT did most of his writing to satisfy the creditors of a bankrupt publishing house in which he was interested, despite the fact that nobody of importance really held him to account. The strange part of it was, however, that he entertained extensively at Abbotsford throughout the period, and very few of his guests ever caught him at work. But work he certainly did; and messengers coming for copy found him ever ready.

Many literary men gain exceptional peace of mind by setting regular hours for labor. Edwin Milton Royle, author of "The Squaw Man," tries to put in four hours a day, between breakfast and luncheon. Robert W. Chambers also employs the forenoon, starting in by reading over what he did the day before and then writing new copy from that point on. Frederic Van Renssalaer Dey used to arise at daybreak and work till about nine o'clock when he breakfasted. The day proper he spent in visiting friends and acquiring fresh material. With all his seeming leisure, he wrote, in addition to the thousand "Nick Carters" and a lot of miscellaneous stories and articles under his own name, three novels a year under pseudonyms.

Writers who work regularly instead of as the spirit moves them, almost invariably are persons who have thoroughly disabused their minds of the possibility of finding "easier ways." They favor the mornings because the sooner their work is attacked the sooner it is done. But as honest and

as commendable as this attitude is, it is a fact that forcing one's self to drive through on schedule, frequently produces only mediocre work, while the tortured *littérateur* who frazzles his own nerves in trying to find fresh excuses for not getting down to business, necessarily revolves in his mind for that same length of time the idea that weighs so heavily upon his conscience. Perhaps it is thus that when he does ultimately put pen to paper, he arrives at a truer, better inspiration. Really I don't know. I admire the methodical ones; but I cannot blind myself to the circumstance that the great geniuses of the world have generally been erratic and fitful.²

Do not misunderstand me about this. It is all right about waiting for moods, and much trash is produced when an author writes things that his heart isn't in; but inspiration frequently develops out of forcing and will come in no other way. It was Tolstoy's view that, "inspiration comes with writing." Just because a man writes does not mean that he has to give it all to the public. Owen Davis, who puts so much on paper that he usually has five or six plays on hand at one time, has told me that in his first rough draft of a 'script, there will be only about fifty per cent that is usable. Certain it is that "getting the play on paper" is a big step; the work after that is comparatively easy and goes correspondingly faster.

The men who favor burning the midnight oil are generally, as is to be expected, somewhat temperamental. They have waited till now partly because they habitually cannot force themselves to work till the last moment (and consequently lie abed all next morning to make up for it), and partly because, being so intensely alive to and distracted by even the trivialities of the waking day, they cannot concentrate till darkness closes in. It's largely *habît* of mind, of course. The morning men are men who have disciplined themselves to give their attention to only what they want to see; they can work unperturbed in a boiler-shop. The men of the night watch, on the contrary, are commonly those whose minds, in

² "My counsel is to force nothing, and rather to trifle and sleep away all unproductive days and hours, than on such days to compose something which will afterward give one no pleasure."—Goethe, "Conversations," March 11, 1828.

process of composition, are almost uncontrollable in receiving suggestions.

Encouraging thoughts to knock about in the mind, so to speak, virtually forming their own associations willy-nilly, strikes me as a rather dangerous indulgence. A mind urged to scatter is difficult to discipline when order is necessary; while once the habit is thoroughly formed, it will go on using up nervous energy at times when the body needs its rest. This kind of mental activity is substantially the same as occurs in our dreams, save that in our dreams there is no exercise of will; but even in dreams it can be highly exhausting, as virtually every one knows. Robert Louis Stevenson may have owed much of his ill health to this fact. In all events, his mind was so peculiarly developed—apparently along these lines—that while he slept the problems of his waking consciousness were often carried on in his dreams and sometimes solved. Stevenson seems to have attached an occult importance to this natural psychological process, and called the agency that seemed so to help his literary composition, "the Brownies."³

Bronson Howard, an inveterate smoker of mild cigars, went through what he called "the smoking stage," which his friend, Daniel Frohman, in his "Memories of a Manager," describes as "the construction period—that stage in which an author materializes in his mind all the active events and incidents of a drama, to get it into a symmetrical framework, exactly as a building is constructed, with foundation, girders, beams, and floors, until the naked structure is completed."

AIDS TO CONCENTRATION

THE average dramatist is somewhere between the mean and the extreme. He has a certain ability to pick and choose the suggestions he needs, turning a deaf ear to the remainder; but this does not mean that he can perform in a boiler-shop. As an ordinary human being he can only work at a time and

³ Sir Arthur Wing Pinero speaks of "the Brownies" at interesting length in his lecture before the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh entitled, "Robert Louis Stevenson as a Dramatist." This lecture has been printed by the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, New York, 1914.

place where distractions are not too much in evidence. Ibsen, who unquestionably had a large share of common sense, could not, in his working hours, stand even the prolonged conversation of visitors in an adjoining room. On the other hand, that apostle of healthy wisdom, William Cobbett, repeatedly ridiculed (especially in his "Advice to Young Men and Women," I think) the supposition that a man of vigorous thought could not write as he did, in a room filled with romping children. It seems to me that on this point a little compromise is reasonable. I try not to humor myself about my writing duties; and yet I am so easily distracted that although my window overlooks a large and generally quiet suburban landscape, I work much better turned a little away from it.

Bronson Howard used to get away from his home to a little shack that he had built for himself in the country. Robert Benchley, they tell me, is so sensitive to distractions that he prefers to work in a closed room with plain walls—not a picture on them—and without even a pattern on the carpet. In my own work I long ago discovered that in trying to fix my eyes upon something that would not distract while I tried to think concentratedly, my eyes unwittingly fixed themselves on a dark corner of the room. I therefore provided myself with a framed piece of black velvet; and this, hanging conveniently on the wall, has proved useful, especially in writing motion picture continuity where frequent changes of camera angle call for extraordinary powers of visualization.

When Eckermann, on March 25, 1831, admired an elegant green elbow-chair which Goethe had lately bought at an auction, the great old man delivered himself thus: "I shall use it but little or not at all; for all kinds of commodiousness are against my nature. You see in my chamber no sofa; I always sit in my old wooden chair, and never till a few weeks ago have I had a leaning-place for my head. If surrounded by convenient tasteful furniture, my thoughts are absorbed, and I am placed in an agreeable but passive state. Unless we are accustomed to them from early youth, splendid chambers and elegant furniture are for people who neither have nor can have any thoughts."

The point would seem to be that the distractions must not force themselves to the writer's attention. He can, if he has to, work successfully in the midst of alien activity. The newspaper man does it every day in the editorial rooms where the clatter of typewriters and jangling telephones and other commotion constitute a sort of general buzz that he, by a fairly simple effort of will, shuts out of his consciousness until he needs some part of it. The general distraction is unimportant; the specific, sharp bid for attention emphatically is annoying. In the newspaper office no one bids for the reporter's attention without good reason; but in the quiet home the direct address to the man who is trying to work must prove disruptive of his thought. With this sound psychology as an explanation, the simple device of Charles Robert Maturin, Irish novelist and dramatist, author of "Melmoth," seems not so fantastic. In Berwick's "Life and Letters" the author relates that Maturin, by sticking a red wafer on his forehead, used to signify to his household that he wished to be considered under the influence of poetic inspiration and not disturbed.

STRICTLY PERSONAL

PROBABLY no sort of dramatist postpones his work as much as the type represented now by George M. Cohan, and earlier by Charles Hoyt. Cohan sometimes engages his cast and starts his play in rehearsal when he has written but a single act. He watches his people intently as they visualize his scenes, and derives from that all manner of useful ideas that he incorporates in revision and in the next act. This next act is written feverishly that night or perhaps over a convenient week-end holiday. In turn it is placed into rehearsal; and the process goes on till the play is finished. Charles Hoyt, author of "The Midnight Bell," "A Texas Steer," "Temperance Town" and many other farces exceedingly successful in their time, used to start rehearsals with the scantiest kind of 'script and "build up" his plays as they were performed publicly "on the road" in "the dog towns" outlying New York City. His practice becoming known, audiences

in these towns flocked to his plays expressly to view the changes from performance to performance.

In contrast with this knockabout composition, David Belasco rarely spends less than two years making a play ready. His heavy accumulation of notes stands around him in baskets, while those he immediately needs are pinned on screens within easy reach. He dictates everything to two stenographers who work in relays; and he personally acts the play out in great detail as he goes along. When he is exhausted the notes are transcribed and prepared for his revision at the next session. Belasco always has acted out his plays. In the old days of Daniel Frohman's Lyceum Theater stock company, that was how he collaborated with Henry C. De Mille.⁴

Most established playwrights prefer to dictate their first roughing-out in some such manner as this, while others choose to write for themselves, with pencil frequently, with pen and ink, or—more commonly nowadays—on their own typewriters. An interesting kind of dictation is illustrated in this book in the page reproduced from "Survival," by Leslie Howard and Kilbourn Gordon. In this case the collaborators assumed certain characters and talked back and forth with each other while a stenographer duly recorded the conversation. For my part, I have never found dictation easy. As to the writing materials, it is interesting to note that Clyde Fitch used to disentangle his several revisions of one 'script by making each revision with a different-colored pencil.

Edmund Gosse has told, in his "Henrik Ibsen," how the great Norwegian used small objects on his writing table to represent his characters in the process of composition, investing them with life in his imagination and moving them about as he saw their action. This method is common enough in playwriting. I believe the elder Dumas did something of the sort. Seeking the same magic I have tried it in my

⁴ "Memories of a Manager," by Daniel Frohman, New York, 1911, p. 32f. Aristotle anticipated even this approach. In his "Poetics" (XVII), he suggests that, "the poet should work out his play to the best of his power, with appropriate gestures, for those who feel emotion are most convincing through natural sympathy with the characters they represent."

own plays, employing for the purpose paper-weights, ink-bottles, and other convenient portables; but I speedily came to the conclusion that the whole device was just one more plaything to distract the dramatist from his labors, and swept them all away. What I do find useful is a small sketch or model of the intended stage setting; but beyond that and the structural notes, I think the dramatist does very well to carry the material in his head.

After being so emphatic about the importance of work, it seems a little paradoxical to urge the importance of rest. Yet a dramatist will always think more clearly and write better for his well-earned repose. He will write more forcefully out of a mind undisturbed by outside worry and pain. Wilkie Collins wrote his celebrated novel, "The Moonstone," in a state of almost constant agony, they say, but this was in spite of, not because of. The dramatist will do well to do nothing but amuse himself in his sabbatical year; he will do well, when he feels himself dull and hard to arouse after an intensely productive season, not to force his output, but to stay fallow till enthusiasm comes again. The springs of inspiration dry up, but in a rich nature only for a time. This is not in playwriting alone, however.

Pinero, I understand, does no work to speak of during the London social season, but spends the time acquiring material. Many another writer, realizing the importance of acquiring before giving, goes deeply into the world of which he intends to write, before venturing to put pen to paper. Thus it may be that Plautus had more than his bread-and-butter question in mind when he gave up playwriting for some years and followed a trade.

It would be entertaining to go on with anecdotes about how various dramatists work and have worked. Nevertheless, I do not think that the net result would contribute much to the underlying truths about method that the reader already knows. So, quite abruptly, I bid him (or her) good-by and good luck, pausing only long enough to observe the formalities of a Bibliography and an Index.



CHAPTER XLIV

SOME OTHER BOOKS TO READ

IT HAS always surprised me a little to see the library of the usual person who is profitably engaged in creative writing—to see how small it is. The typical business man maintains for his family a far better list of titles than the average literary craftsman, meaning, of course, one especially engaged in play and fiction writing. Editors and authors of *belles-lettres* commonly have large collections. Horace Howard Furness's magnificent theater library at Philadelphia, for instance, the rooms reproducing the fine English library at Eton, and including a treasure-vault in which is kept, among other relics, a precious pair of gloves that Shakespeare wore, is impressive enough to make the privileged visitor speak in a hushed voice for months.

The working dramatist is rarely so blest. Bronson Howard's library, that he bequeathed to the Society of American Dramatists and Composers, was originally contained in a single modest bookcase and embraced a number of odd works that had nothing whatever to do with the theater. It is not that the playwright has no use for books, but that he has little time for them—and I don't mean leisure time. As far as works on his profession are concerned, he naturally wants a different sort of mental fodder when he leaves his desk. Nevertheless, I am attempting here to suggest a number of more-or-less technical works, books, and essays, that in my opinion are worth having. If the dramatist has stopped reading theater books, he will benefit from checking-up on the new ones. It will not hurt him even to re-read the old ones. After a time the books we read slip away from us and fall correspondingly in our estimation. Even so inter-

ested a theater man as W. T. Price, picking up his long-neglected copy of Aristotle's "Poetics," found that in his maturer vision the work now had a fresher, richer meaning. This incident was what led him to write his note, "Have You Read Aristotle's 'Poetics' or Do You Only Think You Have?"

A SELECT LIBRARY OF FOUR BOOKS

THE first recommendations cover a minimum library of reference. I think that the fewest books I would want are four. First would be "The Development of the Drama" by Brander Matthews (New York, 1909), which traces briefly and clearly the connected history to the close of the nineteenth century. It names important dramatists of each period and sketches circumstances of production. Second would come the same author's admirable volume, "A Study of the Drama" (Boston, 1910), defining related factors that make drama a vital force—dramatist, theater, play, actor, and audience. Third would be a splendid and unique survey of critical literature made and edited by Barrett H. Clark under title, "European Theories of the Drama" (Cincinnati, 1918). And rounding out the quartet, bringing the survey through the first quarter of the twentieth century to the present day, would be another valuable guide and commentary by Barrett Clark—"A Study of the Modern Drama" (New York, 1925, new edition, 1928).

From this nucleus the collector may expand intelligently in all directions. With the names of the significant dramatists to direct him, he may gather their plays and study their methods therefrom to his heart's content. He may amplify his knowledge of theaters and actors and audiences from clues provided, and waste neither his time nor money. The search for printed plays is much facilitated these days by available collections ready gathered. For instance, Brander Matthews has brought together in a single volume entitled, "The Chief European Dramatists" (Boston, 1916), twenty-one plays from the drama of Greece, Rome, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Denmark and Norway, from 500 B.C. to 1879 A.D. Some notable collections of later plays are George Pierce

Baker's "Modern American Plays" (New York, 1920) and Thomas H. Dickinson's "Chief Contemporary Dramatists," first and second series (Boston, 1915 and 1921). Others are named in the rich bibliographies concluding Barrett Clark's "Study of the Modern Drama."

If one is not content just to fill this small space on the shelf, he may add to his historical section the six-volume general work by Karl Mantzius, "A History of Theatrical Art in Ancient and Modern Times" (London, 1903-1924), following with the more specialized books: Jane Ellen Harrison's "Ancient Art and Ritual" (London, 1913); Roy C. Flickinger's "The Greek Theater and Its Drama" (Chicago, 1918); "The Mediæval Stage," two volumes by E. K. Chambers (Oxford, 1903); A. W. Ward's three-volume "History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne" (Cambridge, 1899); Percy Fitzgerald's "A New History of the English Stage" (London, 1882, two volumes); "The Old Drama and the New," by William Archer (Boston, 1923); two two-volume works by Frederick Hawkins, "Annals of the French Stage from its Origin to the Death of Racine" (London, 1884) and "The French Stage in the Eighteenth Century" (London, 1888); "Shakespeare in France," by Jules Jusserand (London, 1899); "The Memoirs of Count Carlo Gozzi," translated and edited by John Addington Symonds, two volumes (London, 1890); "The Spanish Stage in the Time of Lope de Vega," by Hugo Albert Rennert (New York, 1909); "The Path of the Modern Russian Stage," by Alexander Bakshy (London, 1916); "A History of the American Drama," by Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York, 1925-1927); "The Theatre of Today," by Hiram Kelly Moderwell (New York, 1914, new edition, 1927); and "The Theatre of Max Reinhardt" by Huntley Carter (London, 1914). These works, intelligently read, should provide a person with a good general knowledge and a valuable perspective on what the theater has done and is doing. There is much more such literature to be added for the reader's gain, and it seems unfair discrimination not to name some of it; but the books given provide rich bibliographies that extend far into that historical, interpretative branch.

WORKS OF THE PIONEERS

TO DEVELOP for this particular book a list of works dealing specifically with playmaking is consistent enough, however. In starting that, it will be useful to recommend to the person who wants only a selected list in this narrower field, in addition to the others named in the opening quartet, George Pierce Baker's "Dramatic Technique" (Boston, 1919); William Archer's "Playmaking" (Boston, 1912); and W. T. Price's "The Technique of the Drama" (New York, 1892). I give these in an order of precedence because the latest work has profited correspondingly from the researches and philosophy of those going before. At the same time, each has its distinctly individual points of helpfulness.

Expanding further, one obviously must accord early attention to the internationally standard works. Aristotle's "Poetics" remains an enduring rock. The outstanding translation to-day seems to be that of S. H. Butcher (fourth edition, London, 1907), which is procurable either with or without the translator's commentary, "Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art." The poetical treatises of Horace, Vida, and Boileau are grouped in a highly useful book edited with introduction and notes by Albert S. Cook (Boston, 1892). Jonson's "Timber, or Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter," has been edited by Felix E. Schelling (New York, 1892). The pertinent works of John Dryden have been collected by various dependable editors, a useful issue being the edition of William Strunk, Jr. (New York, 1908). The contributions of Charles Lamb may be found in his "Plays and Dramatic Essays" with an introduction by Rudolph Dircks (London, no date). "Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare and Some Other Old Poets and Dramatists," by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is in "Everyman's Library" (London, 1907). Here also (1910) is William Hazlitt's "Lectures on the English Comic Writers and Miscellaneous Essays."

A. W. Schlegel's "Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature" is available in the celebrated Bohn Library (London,

1913, and in earlier printings). In the Bohn Library also is to be found Lessing's "Hamburg Dramaturgy" or "Dramatic Notes" (latest edition, 1913) and "The Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret" (latest edition, 1913). The authorized translation of Gustav Freytag's "Technique of the Drama" is by Elias J. MacEwan (fourth edition, Chicago, 1908). Richard Wagner's references to playwriting and production may be read in W. A. Ellis's eight-volume translation, "Richard Wagner's Prose Works" (London, 1892-1899), or in careful extracts in "The Art, Life and Theories of Richard Wagner," by E. L. Burlingame (New York, 1875). Victor Hugo's utterances are to be found in the prefaces to his various plays. To these must be added George Bernard Shaw's "Dramatic Opinions and Essays" (two volumes, New York, 1907) and "The Quintessence of Ibsenism" (New York, 1891, new edition 1913) and Henry Arthur Jones's splendid collections, "The Renaissance of the English Drama" (New York, 1895) and "The Foundations of a National Drama" (New York, 1913).

William Thompson Price's "Technique" has already been mentioned. His other technical works are: "The Analysis of Play Construction and Dramatic Principle" (New York, 1908); "The Philosophy of Dramatic Principle and Method," which was privately printed for use in his School about 1910, and in 1912 and 1913 was run serially in his magazine *The American Playwright*, and "Why Plays Fail," an incompleted and unbound collection of criticisms of current plays, taken largely from his unsigned contributions of many years to *The Theatre Magazine*. There are also the unpublished, mimeographed "supplementary letters" used by his students in his formal course. These, in themselves, would make a fair-sized volume.

For the slenderer contributions to playmaking theory—that is, essays too short (but not necessarily too unimportant) for display on a shelf of stout books, the eminently worth-while ones are presented in Clark's "European Theories." In that place, in a surprisingly full list, may be found not only generous extracts from rare works like D'Aubignac's "The Whole Art of the Stage," but the first

and only English translations of essential parts of "On Comedy and Tragedy," by Ælius Donatus; the "Poetics" of Daniello, that of Minturno, that of Sebillot, of Jean Chapelain, and that of Jean de la Taille; the preface to "Tyr et Sidon" by François Ogier; the "First Discourse On the Uses and Elements of Dramatic Poetry," by Pierre Corneille; prefaces of Jean Racine; Diderot's "On Dramatic Poetry;" the "Essay on the Serious Drama," by Beaumarchais and his "Dedicatory Letter" to "The Barber of Seville;" Emile Zola's "Preface to 'Thérèse Raquin'" and the preface to "Un père prodigue" by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*. Brief introductions sum up the untouched essays of each period. Another collection in a narrower field that will yield interesting observations on playmaking, is J. E. Spingarn's "Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century" (second edition, Oxford, 1908-1909, three volumes). Clews to missing essays up to the close of the nineteenth century, may be found in George Saintsbury's monumental "History of Criticism" in three volumes (New York, 1906-1908), although I see little for the dramatist to gain in ferreting them out.

In 1914, under the distinguished leadership of Brander Matthews, the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University began the reprinting—with introductions and notes that in themselves are sometimes nearly as valuable as the works upon which they comment—of certain valuable papers on acting and playmaking. The editions are extremely limited; but copies may be found at the larger libraries. In the first series (1914) were: "The New Art of Making Plays," by Lope de Vega; "The Autobiography of a Play," by Bronson Howard; "The Law of the Theatre," by Ferdinand Brunetière, and "Robert Louis Stevenson as a Dramatist," by Sir Arthur Wing Pinero. In the third series (1916) were: "How Shakespeare Came to Write the Tempest," by Rudyard Kipling; "How Plays are Written," consisting of letters from Augier, Dumas, Sardou, Zola and others; "A Stage Play," by Sir W. S. Gilbert; and "A Theory of the Theatre," by Francisque Sarcey. The fourth series (1919) comprised: "Goethe on the Theatre," being selections from the Oxenford translation of Goethe's "Conversations;" "Gol-

doni on Playwriting;" "Prospero's Island" by Edward Everett Hale; and "Letters of an Old Playgoer," by Matthew Arnold.

SIDELIGHTS

AMONG useful older essays on playmaking that deserve more attention than they ordinarily receive, George Meredith's "Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit" (New York, 1911) is too infrequently read. John Galsworthy's "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama," that was first published in *The Fortnightly Review* (for the year 1909), and "The New Spirit in the Drama" (1913), ought to be in honored places on all dramatic book-shelves. Sydney Grundy, who was a very successful dramatist in his day, wrote "Dramatic Construction" for *The London Theatre* (April, 1881) and also a book with the remarkable title for an author of then advanced years, "The Play of the Future" (London, 1914). The articles written by Dion Boucicault for *The North American Review* (1878-1889) are sometimes paraphrases of Aristotle and later critics; but every now and then, rather than commit himself to what seems a doubtful view, he contributes an original bit out of his rich and varied experience. These essays include: "The Art of Dramatic Composition" (January-February, 1878); "My Pupils" (October, 1888); "Shakespeare's influence on the Drama" (December, 1888); and "Mutilations of Shakespeare, the Poet Interviewed" (1889). The correspondence of Washington Irving and John Howard Payne, printed in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1910, is richly suggestive, while the fragmentary published correspondence of Bulwer-Lytton and William Charles Macready is even more important because the advice there comes from the practical theater man to the novelist instead of the other way around.

Among recently collected critical essays, much stimulating thought will be found in the various books of the kind from the pen of Brander Matthews: "Studies of the Stage" (New York, 1894); "Playwrights on Playmaking" (New York, 1923); "Principles of Playmaking" (New York, 1919); "A Book About the Theatre" (New York, 1916),

and "Rip Van Winkle Goes to the Play" (New York, 1926). Clayton Hamilton also is suggestive in his collections: "The Theory of the Theatre" (New York, 1910); "Studies in Stagecraft" (New York, 1914); "Problems of the Playwright" (New York, 1917), and "Seen on the Stage" (New York, 1920).

Newspapers have always been fond of symposiums entitled "How I Write Plays"; and in that way many a bit of technical advice, that never otherwise would have seen the light of day, has been given to the world. The best modern collection of the kind, apart from that already mentioned from Ogier, Dumas, Sardou, and Zola, is a series of long interviews by Harold L. Stearns, printed over about a dozen consecutive Sundays in the now defunct *New York Press*, during the season 1913-1914. The interviewed included Rachel Crothers, Margaret Mayo, Edgar Selwyn, Hartley Manners, Avery Hopwood, George Bronson-Howard, and others. I have quoted repeatedly from this series in the present book. What probably is another interesting group is a symposium conducted in 1892 by the editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*. The subject there was, "Why I Don't Write Plays;" and among the contributors were "Ouida" and Thomas Hardy. I have not actually seen this series—only a comment upon it in *The London Theatre* for October of the year mentioned.

Augustus Thomas has preferred to do his technical writing in Continental fashion—in the prefaces to his printed plays. Mark Swan, author of numerous farces, has issued a book called, "How You Can Write Plays" (New York, 1927). "How to Write a Play" (New York, 1925) bears the name of Eugene Walter—the same who wrote "Paid in Full" and "The Easiest Way." Charlton Andrews, author, adapter and producer of various recent stage pieces, wrote also "The Technique of Playwriting" (Springfield, Mass., 1915). Percival Wilde has written "The Craftsmanship of the One-Act Play" (Boston, 1923). Louis Evan Shipman, with a number of interesting plays to his credit, also has written a book for those who seek success in the theater. Only it's not a book on playwriting. It covers his experi-

ence in selling and producing his play, "D'Arcy of the Guards." Its name is, "The True Adventures of a Play" (New York, 1914).

One of the first playwriting books of American authorship was Alfred Hennequin's "The Art of Playwriting" (Boston, 1890), paving the way for numerous others. Companion works of the immediate time, however, are mostly English: Calmour's "Practical Playwriting," a book I have never seen (Bristol, 1891); Frank Archer's "How to Write a Good Play" (London, 1892); and Jerome's "Playwriting," reprinted from *The Stage* (London, 1888). "The Drama, Its Law and Technique," by Elisabeth Woodbridge (Boston, 1898), is avowedly an interpretation of Freytag's "Technique." Moses Malevinsky, author of "The Science of Playwriting" (New York, 1925), is a distinguished American lawyer whose wide experience in the legal end of the theater, especially in plagiarism cases, led him to devise an algebraic formula for detecting similarity in plays. Charles Caffin's "Appreciation of the Drama" (New York, 1908) is a work intended to serve as a general introduction to the theater, following the same general plan so splendidly used two years later by Brander Matthews in his "Study of the Drama." "How to See a Play" (New York, 1914), by Richard Burton, long head of the Drama League of America, has the same purpose of reaching the average theatergoer; but the author devotes the bulk of his space to play construction, rather than to history as Caffin does. The work, although necessarily not profound, is worthy of special note here because it endeavors to apply Price's proposition. Fanny Cannon, author of "Writing and Selling a Play" (New York, 1915), gained her view of the theater primarily from an acting experience.

The little book by Arthur Hopkins, bearing the catchy but misleading title, "How's Your Second Act?" (New York, 1918), deals with producing method and not play construction. In its own line it is interesting and suggestive.

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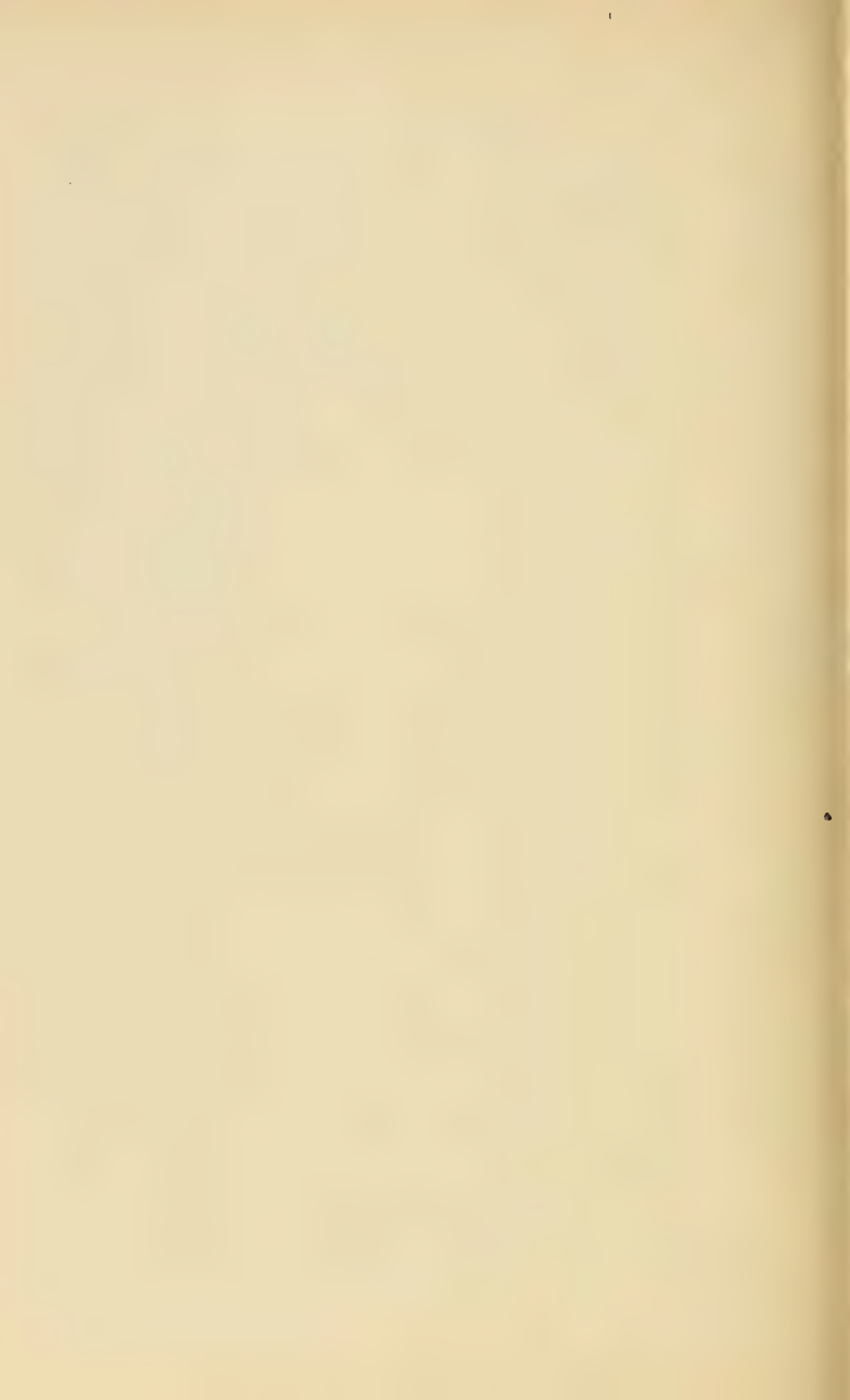
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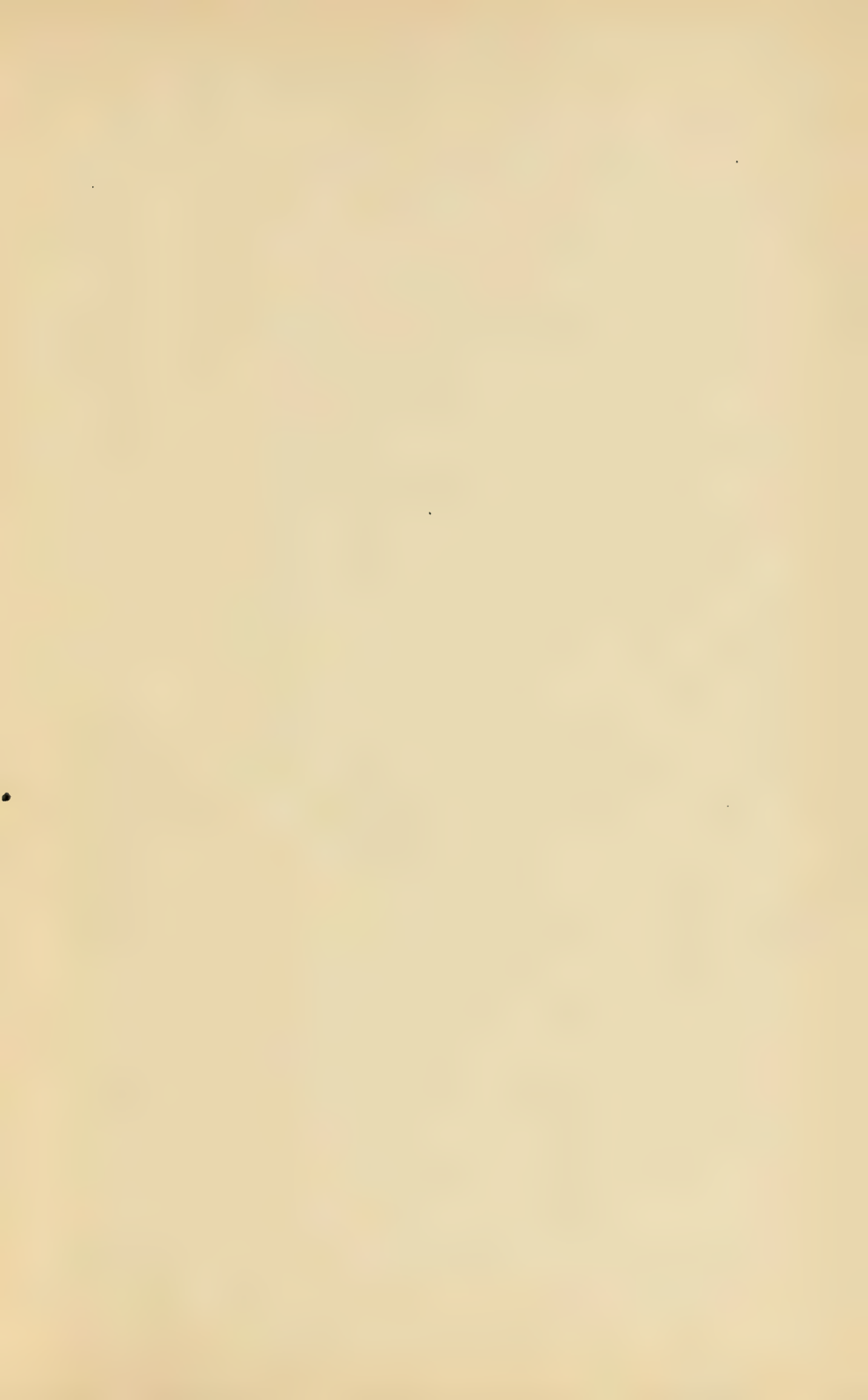
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- first determine the one thing you want to say in a play, and establish it with the audience
- only one single subject for a play - or any work of art, one single action or deed or idea or change
 - an action need not be physical activity, it may be a spiritual unfoldment or change (as in Oedipus)
 - an action is merely a steady development of subject matter
 - a play may have any chronological order
 - the turning-point or Climax comes between the ~~complication~~ and the unraveling
 - the 5 parts of a play
 - the 4 parts of a Greek play
 - 22 - We are two-fold: material + spiritual + this is the origin of drama
 - 26 - How active should the unsympathetic side be? After the precipitating act it should be the blocker of the sympathetic side.
 - 26 - Action → reaction → action, etc.
 - 27 - Each plot step consists of an unsatisfactory oppressive condition created by the unsympathetic side for the good side, followed by a move of the hero to remedy it
 - 28⁻¹²⁹ - the audience should know more about the subject
 - 53 - We need the separate thoughts + episodes in a play, not one continuous line of action

180-185 See how and their dramatic questions work

★ 196-⁷ using cards

★ 92 - the original aggressor sacrifices the audience's sympathy

254 - a play needs atmosphere

258 - the "movement" of a scene

90, 97 - Where to start the play - "In media res"

99 - The cause of the action or the

cap xiv 89 Precipitating Act

97 - the tendency is to start a play too far back

227 - where to begin?

90 - The audience comes to see the open struggle, not the preparation for it

228 - "in media res" - in the midst of events

230 - don't use flashbacks

100 - The alternatives must be clear to the audience.

★ 100 - The Dramatic Question is double: Will the protagonist win or will the other side win? Because the Dramatic Problem consists of two sides in opposition.

73 - "Drama shows the will striving toward a goal"

★ 92 - "Dilemma" is the essential thought, because we have 2 opposing principles presenting alternatives

- 96 - precipitating act by sympathetic and
96 - the help of using Index cards
96 - what he calls an episode
200 - Knows made screen histories
221 - two principles are struggling
for supremacy, and the audience
wants one of them to win
221-22 - much of the zest of life
would be gone without the
element of Evil for Right to fight
224 - just before one incident is to be
completed, introduce a preparatory
bit of the next incident - it
makes a question for the audience
226 - keep reminding the audience
of the main struggle of the play
249 - in first 5 minutes establish who, what,
when, where, how, why
72 - Drama arises when 2 principles
battle each other
Cut-and-flush technique to keep
up interest
72 - Drama shows a Change
73 - "The inward struggle of man
toward a deed has always
the highest charm."
89 - the Precipitating Act
179 - A play contains a series of
problems or episodes
202 - to sustain interest, you introduce
the problem of the next episode
166 - Discard all that does not
contribute to the main point
of the story

180-185 - see how successive episodes and their
202 dramatic questions work!

185 - the precipitating act make a
fight to the finish inevitable.
With the precipitating act, the
problem of the sequence is
automatically stated

185 - the best places for intermissions

186 - all dramatic action is one of three
kinds: 1) the circumstances out
of which action grows 2) the action
itself, 3) the end (or results)
of that action

187 - how Shakespeare handles a lapse
187 of 16 years time in "A Winter's Tale"

187 - generally a sequence opens with
the sympathetic side in
unfortunate circumstances.

187 - otherwise, open with the
triumph of the negative side

188 - the sequence usually closes
with the sympathetic side rebelling
against the tyranny of the negative side

188 - every sequence but the last
usually concludes with the
menace in the ascendant,

188 - the end of the play:
the death blow

189 - plan your sequences first

193 - a proposition should make a clear
statement of the conflicting aims of
the two sides at issue

194-195 example of zigzag conflict

- 3- in drama the element of necessity
is essential
- 124- the necessity need not be known by the characters, but the audience must know it
- 0- the main issue must be thrashed out clearly in the light of day
- 4- prepare the audience in the beginning for the point of my play, what I am trying to show them
- 36- summarize the action at the end of each act
- 42- suspense through alternating scenes of both sides, + how to structure it
- 46- use flashes to fill time lapses in the major action
- 2- during a play the audience is caught in a spell + does not think
- 152- we go to the theater to feel, to have our emotions evoked
- 153- the stage piece is an illusion for the audience
- 154- it is a spell
- 1- a play is action, not exposition + narrative
- 60- Molière's scene is great 183
- 66- the dramatic question, 181, 182
- 67- outline + list all the chronological steps first
- 180- very interesting suspenseful sequence
- 185- It is like a game of chess - the conflict! see the dramatist

- 55 - the aim of the poet is to carry out one great and complete action, not more
- 56 - decide ^{more} what you want to say then use only materials that help you say it. It is one subject treated in many ramifications
- 56 - the first step is to define your purpose
- 68 - Aristotle divides a play into 2 parts: Complication and Unraveling or Denouement, with a Turning-Point between them
- * 86-87 - plot & counter-plot in Hamlet - show each side
- * 88 - show both sides of the conflict
- * +92 - two opposing principles presenting alternatives
- { 96 - ^{how to start?} determine the point of your story
- { 96 - the first act of aggression
- 97 - the real play is the open conflict
- 100 - the dramatic problem consists of two sides in opposition
- 98 - the clash is of arms
- * 101 - the precipitating act is the cause of the action, 103, 89, 185, 99
- 111 - Schiller: a play is an action + the events leading up to it
- or 107
- 111 - Goethe: use a series of significant events
- 116 * strengthen the obstructive work of
- 116 - the negative side
- 120 - how Shakespeare handled Romeo & Juliet
- 120 - preparing for characters ahead
- * 121 - the forward movement of a plot is a zigzag back & forth from the unsympathetic side to the sympathetic
- 122 - using questions to focus attention
- * 122 - the drama is kept up by the constant assertion of the "menace" or unsympathetic side

